

CutBank

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Spring 1985

CutBank 24

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Spring/Summer 1985

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Detail: The Minotaur: lithograph by James G. Davis

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CutBank

where the big fish lie

**A. B. Guthrie, Jr. Short Fiction Award
Richard Hugo Memorial Poetry Award**



CutBank announces its annual competition for the best short story and best poem published each year in CutBank. First Prize: \$100.00 each category. Honorable Mention: \$50.00 each category. Send submissions to: The Editors, CutBank, c/o English Department, University of Montana, Missoula, Montana 59812.

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CUTBANK 24

Spring / Summer 1985

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Copies of back issues are still available. Numbers 1-23 (excluding 2 and 16) are available in a set for \$30.00.

Cover: Details of "Attic" and "The Minotaur," prints by James G. Davis.

CUTBANK Announces the Winners . . .

THE RICHARD HUGO MEMORIAL POETRY AWARD:

FIRST PRIZE: "Girl On A White Porch" by Nancy
Schoenberger

HONORABLE MENTION: "The Sleepwalker" by
Jack Heflin

JUDGE: Sandra Alcosser

THE A.B. GUTHRIE, JR. SHORT FICTION AWARD:

FIRST PRIZE: Novel Excerpts from THE BLIND
CORRAL by Ralph Beer and Novel Ex-
cerpts from JOURNEYMEN by Neil
McMahon

HONORABLE MENTION: "Ray Holly" a short story
by Fred Haefele

JUDGE: Rick DeMarinis

The Richard Hugo Memorial Poetry Award and the A.B. Guthrie, Jr. Short Fiction Award are made annually and selected from work published in CUTBANK. This year's winners were selected from Issues 23 and 24.



The Big Waterfall: watercolor by Bruce McGrew

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Photos of Cover Prints: William Pitt Root



Two Figures: oil by Bruce McGrew

Bruce McGrew is a painter who exhibits nationally and teaches at the University of Arizona. Besides living and working at Rancho Linda Vista in Oracle, Arizona, Mr. McGrew regularly teaches painting during the summer in Guadalajara, Mexico.

From *Journeymen*

Sweat

The road to Charlie's place was twisted and hard to find. I drove the deep canyons and rutted trails of memory, through a dark silent forest of blackened limbs and scorched stumps from a fire of years before. I could not see the moon, but I knew it was on the wax. We had crossed paths in the Oregon desert the previous night. Then, as now, it had been the only other thing moving.

No one had answered my knock at Beth's, though her car was in the drive and a light on in the living room. I had walked to the window and stared at a tableau that might have been arranged for me: her wine mug sitting on the coffee table, and beside it, an old-fashioned glass amber with the leavings of whiskey and ice. I was dimly aware that the drawings on the walls had migrated, disappeared, been renewed, but my gaze stayed on the empty place where the trophy I had brought home from the prison once rested on its high shelf, overseeing the life of the house. In the mountains, the night wind on my face carried the news of winter.

Charlie's gate was locked. I could see the silhouette of the house a hundred yards farther, sheltered by a belt of larch. Lights warmed the lower-story windows and smoke traced curls against the blue-black sky. Up this high, the Milky Way glittered like a spray of phosphorescent buckshot. I got out and waited for something to tell me what to do. Nothing did. I climbed the fence and walked on up the rise. I knew that Charlie would hear my tread on the hollow porch, that those steps were the last place I could turn back. I started up them, some part of me piloting, another observing almost without curiosity.

Beth opened the door. She was wearing a raglan wool sweater I had given her. At the back of the room, Charlie stood facing us with narrowed eyes. His hand hovered near the desk drawer where he kept his Smith & Wesson .357. I saw recognition come to him. His hand did not immediately move. I looked back to Beth. Her eyes were cool, but color had risen in her cheeks.

She stepped aside and I went in. The click of the door behind me closed out the world of common sense. Charlie's hand relaxed, but he kept watching me. The place looked softer than I remembered, and I became aware of small changes: a throw rug, a new couch, hanging plants and drawings on the walls. I recognized some of the drawings and plants.

Finally he said, "You drinking these days?" I nodded. He left the room. From the kitchen I heard the clink of ice in a glass. Beth moved too casually to the

stereo and thumbed through the records. When Charlie gave me the drink, we took care to keep our hands from touching. I tasted my first whiskey in more than half a year.

"I got the sweat all fired up," he said. "Why don't you come with us."

Beth stayed bent over the records, but her hands stopped moving. The sweat was the smallest and hottest place I had ever been inside. Charlie's face was grim.

"Yes," I said.

"You better have another shot. You're way behind."

As he walked again to the kitchen, I heard the hollow electric pop of the needle hitting vinyl. Many months passed before I awoke in the night to that music playing in my mind, and recognized it as a tune from one of her old Grateful Dead albums: "He's Gone."

From the embers of a fire, with a pair of tongs he had shaped and welded himself, he pulled smoking rocks and knelt to place them inside the tiny door of the hut, a dome made of bent saplings covered with hides. It was waist-high and perhaps six feet across at the base. The pit of heated rocks in the center took up all but a narrow ring of ground. They scorched your shins and knees as you sat cross-legged, and the arch of the saplings forced your face over them.

"Ought to do it," Charlie said, standing. He hung the tongs on a branch and set a bucket of water with a ladle in it next to the hut door. I could see the moon now, rising over the mountaintops to the southeast, dimming the stars. I had drunk three stiff shots, and I could feel the liquor coursing through my blood, warming me and blurring edges. I remembered that I had not slept in forty hours. Beth was standing a little apart, by the fire. I had not yet heard her speak. For many seconds the three of us stood there not quite looking at each other. Then she shrugged violently, throwing something annoying off her shoulders. She kicked off her mocassins and without pausing pulled the sweater over her head. Charlie started to unbutton his shirt. Slowly, I crouched to unlace my boots.

"We'll go for ten," he said. I looked up to see Beth, wearing only knee-length socks, folding her clothes. Her skin was the color of liquid bronze, and points of firelight played in the sweep of hair that hid her face. It was like being hit very hard in the stomach.

Charlie held back the flap while first she, then I, went in. Somehow she moved, as always, with grace and dignity. I could feel the sharp bite of pebbles beneath my knees as I crawled naked past his feet.

"Five," Charlie said.

The dried laurel leaves he had thrown on the rocks smoldered with a dim glow and filled the tiny space with the harsh clean scent of bay. Sweat shone on the thick muscles of his chest and arms as he reached for the ladle. I closed my eyes, heard the clink on the bucket's lip, the liquid trilling of dripping water rising rapidly in pitch. I dug the heels of my hands into the ground. An unyielding strut ran the length of my spine as if it were the talon of some giant leathery bird winging me through the night sky to its lair.

Steam exploded from the rocks like a cry of rage, like needle claws tearing at my skin, digging deeper and fiercer in a great billowing swell. I was hugging my chest, face buried in the crook of my elbow, eyes squeezed so tight I saw bright yellow spots dancing into infinity, but it was futile. The claws raked my eyelids, trying to get inside, swarming around my face until I thought I would shriek.

At last it evened out, with the violently heightened temperature hovering like a spirit of malice. I opened my blurred eyes to a faint thrashing sound. Charlie was whipping himself rhythmically across the chest with a laurel frond. He bent forward over the stones and Beth flicked another frond up and down his back with the practiced air of ritual. The curve of the hut forced me to hunch over the stones as if they held my future. I flicked my own laurel across my chest several times, feeling its sharp sting upon my swollen skin. Charlie straightened. His face gave nothing away. Beth let the branch come to rest across her thighs as if it were a fringed garment. Her lowered gaze never left the fire. Her knee brushed mine, then moved away.

"Six," he said.

The howling steam blistered the skin on my shins and arms. I tried to back through the strut. I forced open my eyes but the blinding mist closed them instantly. I realized I was groping for something I could not see, and pulled my arms back around my chest. The lashing sounds came again to my ears, my lungs were filled with the choking scent of bay.

"Seven," Charlie said, and this time I was clawing my way out through the flap while the steam tried viciously to strip me of skin.

Then I was out, rolling on cool earth in cool air. I rolled and rolled and came to my feet without stopping. My eyes were teared, and as I stared down into the night, I saw a streak of light from a car, winding along the road in the canyon far below. I wanted that road to be a river of icy black water. I would plunge into it facing upstream, holding rocks to stay myself against the swift current, and rest there until my blood was as thin and cold as it. Then I would let go, and sail with that river to the end of its journey in a forgotten dark sea, bobbing above and beneath the surface like a sodden log. From the hut I heard a muffled, "Eight," then the hiss of steam. I hurried to the pile of my clothes.

I was lacing my boots when the flap moved. She stood, put hands on her

hips, skin gleaming, hair wild. Moonlight shone through the miracle of the dark absence between her thighs.

"Come with me," I said. I stood too. "I don't care about what happened. I'll take you anywhere."

She began to walk, hands at her sides now, not high at her waist the way she had once come to me, and she did not stop until she was so close I could see the glint of her teeth, pressed against her lower lip.

"Ten," said the iron voice in the hut, and was swallowed in the rush of scalding vapor.

"You treated me like I didn't exist!" she screamed, and then her hand lashed across my cheek. I felt the ripping of her nails. She jumped back, crouched, panting, fists clenched at her sides. I turned and walked the only direction I could, away.

At the gate I stopped and looked back. The two of them stood side by side, silhouetted by the moon, watching me. Behind them two dead larches rose like a pair of immense spiked horns, thrusting up out of the dark earth.

White Midas

If you didn't look too close, the neighborhood seemed normal, working-class, although you might wonder why so many women in short skirts or hot pants were standing alone at the street corners. If you did look close, you would begin to see the peeling paint and sagging steps of the old Victorian houses, divided now into cheap apartments; the dust-caked, broken windows in the garages; the scraggly lawns, the garbage in the alleys, the curtains that twitched when a strange vehicle pulled over to the curb. A woman in a blond wig and red leather microskirt started toward me, purse and hips swinging almost comically. I shook my head. She gave me the finger and stalked back to her post. It was three o'clock in the afternoon.

Tony's gold Trans-Am waited in the driveway, gorgeous with racing stripes, louvers, mag wheels that could have come from the chariots in Ben-Hur. The entire inside of the car, except for the instrument panel, was done in eggshell white angel hair. Both interior and exterior of the vehicle were immaculate. His Mexican boys kept it that way.

Tony ran an insulation business and came around the job sites a lot, checking up on the wetbacks he hired through a body broker named Garcia. He liked to tell anyone who would listen that he made good money because he paid his labor next to nothing. Garcia took half of that, and threatened to have

the men deported if they complained. I doubted that either Tony or Garcia had ever touched a piece of insulation.

Tony also liked to talk about his real business, dealing dope. In fact, he had something of a big mouth, which may have been why he had gotten a good part of it kicked down his throat during the several months he spent in Santa Rita. The story went that he had drawn three-to-five for possession, but after the amateur dentistry, had decided to tell the authorities some things he had not told them before, and an early release was arranged. The story went too that some of the gigs he set up for the younger Mexican kids didn't have anything to do with fiberglass. You would have thought he would be more careful.

But he still talked, and if he took a liking to you, he gave you a card with his address in gold script. I had been by twice before, when I decided I needed chemical help in getting cheered up.

If the car was here, he was here. He never walked anywhere.

He was waiting at the top of the stairs. "What say, dude," he said, in the deep, hearty voice he cultivated, and offered me a bone-crushing shake from his heavily ringed hand. His hair was cut into a helmet-shaped mass of gold ringlets, with bangs and long sides that framed his face. It made him look something like an Afghan hound. Someone had once told me that he had huge, elongated ears, almost like a donkey's, and was careful to keep them hidden. His shirt, navy blue silk with a long pointed collar, was open almost to his navel. A gold medallion on a gold chain rested against his tanned, hairless chest. Belted beige slacks and loafers completed the outfit. He wore immense tinted glasses that hid his eyes. His smile exposed too many teeth, and clearly showed his bridgework. That was gold too.

"Hey, you got to check out my new system," he said. As I stepped through the door into his domain, through a pulsing wave of music with a beat I could feel in my back teeth, I caught a glimpse of a slim brown body in crimson bikini underpants closing the door to the bedroom. Sweet thick incense filled the air like something you could touch. A cut-glass decanter of a syrupy, gold-colored liqueur waited on a table, beside a single glass.

He dead-bolted the door behind me and hurried to a TV set the size of a Volkswagen, surveying it with something that was less pride than lust in his manner.

A woman who looked like an actress said to a talk-show host, "So then this voice from the bunk below says, Yes, but how's she going to get back?" Everyone laughed loudly except the fat man in the farthest seat. He smiled, but his eyes were mean. He cleared his throat and leaned toward the host. Tony's fingers snaked to a VCR and caressed buttons.

"Watch this," he said. The TV clicked, whirled, went out of focus. Abruptly, I was looking at a black-haired woman who appeared to be choking violently on something I could not quite see. After perhaps five energetic seconds,

she flicked her gaze at someone offscreen, nodded, and disengaged herself from the object of her struggles. It turned out to be a penis, a pretty fair-sized one. There was no visible man attached to it. "Hi," she breathed, sultry eyes fixed on the audience. "I'm a tigress." The organ throbbed and waved in a void, helplessly trying to recall her attention.

"I'm in kind of a hurry, Tony," I said, although I wasn't.

"Yeah, sure," he said. He backed away from the screen, glanced thoughtfully at the bedroom, and opened the door to his office.

"I know another tigress," said the TV as I followed him in.

"Make you a deal on a quarter," he said, all business now. "Peruvian flake, hardly been stepped on. Knock the back of your eyeballs off. Eight bills."

"Tony," I said.

"I know, I know it sounds high, but I am not shitting you about the quality of this stuff. Here, let's talk to Johnny." He took the tube he called a Johnny snowflake and a little gold snuffbox from a drawer. His fingers moved faster and faster, shaking white powder out of a ziplock bag, chopping it with a razor, sifting it back and forth, all with the utter concentration of a neurosurgeon. His words tumbled out faster too, as if trying to keep up with his hands.

"... know you guys all think I'm getting fat, but I don't make shit on these little deals, Kevin, and that's the no-bullshit truth, oh, once in a while I get enough ahead to pick up a toy like that VCR, but Jesus, look at the piece of shit car I'm driving, I got my eye on a *real* rig, a gold ElDee, already got it picked out, and one of these days I'm going to be driving a fucking *Bentley*, man, you bet your ass. There's so much beautiful shit out there I got to have, and the jack comes in so slow, it drives me fucking crazy, it's torture. There's just never enough." He laughed, an aggrieved sound. "Tell you something funny. The other night I was eating at Rigetti's, I was all strung up, I knocked over the sugar, and this white flash shot across the table just like a huge line. I stared at it and thought, What if it was? What if I could just touch a sack of sugar or flour and turn it into sweet, uncut cocaine?"

Hands and voice paused, perhaps in shock at the weight of the concept. I said, "I just want a gram."

A second passed before his smile widened. He straightened up, fingers edging the lid back onto the snuffbox. "You know, Kevin, it's hardly worth my time dealing that kind of shit. I mean, a guy's got to make a living." Wet smacking sounds from the TV punctuated low spots in the music. I was suddenly very tired, sorry I had come.

"Okay," I said, "forget it." I turned to leave.

"Hey, take it easy. I didn't say I *wouldn't*. I'm thinking of you, is all. I can give you a quarter for eight, but I got to have one-forty for a gram, all there is to it. Seven times one-forty, that's, lets see—" He reached for a calculator on his desk. I waited while he punched buttons again.

"That's nine hundred and eighty bucks. See what I mean? It doesn't make sense. I mean, you go to the grocery store, do you buy one beer at a time? No, you buy a six-pack, because you know you're going to drink it all sooner or later."

His fingers had not stopped moving on the box lid. At last they made their decision and swept it off. "Come on," he said magnanimously. "Try a pop. This stuff is un-fucking-believable. It's like getting your rocks off."

From the room behind me, I heard the TV say, "Tell the *senorita* I'd like to suck her pussy." Tony was looking at me, eyes hidden behind the tinted glasses, teeth and hair and fingers glittering gold.

"Never mind," I said. "I'll take your word for it." I reached for my wallet. "The quarter?" he said hopefully.

"Just a gram. And a handfull of Beauties if you've got them."

His shrug was a mixture of pity and contempt. "That'll be another ten." He sat and took more paraphernalia out of a drawer. I laid seven twenties and a ten on the desk, and while he measured and weighed and counted, I glanced around the room. It seemed to be filled with cordless telephones, tape recorders, answering machines, cassette players. All of them were shiny, had clean lines, made satisfying sounds: clicks, locks, chirps, hums, you were in tune with the world. The TV was quiet now. Presumably everybody's mouth was full.

Tony tossed a little paper packet and a baggie of shiny black capsules on the desk. He riffled through the bills and tucked them in a drawer. Then he leaned back and eyed me.

"You know what your problem is, Kevin? You don't have any style. Jesus, it's dumb enough you do the kind of work you do. Killer shit. But look at the way you dress, fucking jeans and baggy shirt. Why don't you get yourself some threads, get a decent haircut, a good-looking set of wheels. Next thing you know, people are paying attention to you. They *respect* you. The broads are all over you. Who knows? Maybe somebody offers you a decent job. Maybe somebody—" he leaned forward— "like me."

I took the packet and baggie off the desk and put them in my shirt pocket.

"You picking up what I'm laying down, Kevin? Maybe I need somebody to help me out once in a while. Big dude like you might be good to have around."

I buttoned the pocket. "Thanks, Tony," I said, "but I've never had the inclination to dress like a pimp. Or to work for one."

His face froze. I turned and walked out.

"You cocksucker," he hissed. "I can have you busted up good. I can have you greased."

"The *senorita* says you have a big one," said the TV. "She says it is the biggest one—"

"Get the fuck out of here!" he yelled. "You see me coming on the job, you better *run*, cunt!" I knew he would be on his feet, leaned over the desk. I knew

he would have a gun. But I knew too that the memory of Santa Rita was fresh.

Peripherally, I saw the bedroom door move as I turned the deadbolt: a single dark, almond-shaped eye, a flash of red in the shadows. This time I was sure. It was a boy.

I walked down the stairs and out to my truck, imagining that almond-shaped eyes watched me from all the windows on the street. The whore on the corner glanced at me scornfully. More than twelve hours had passed since I'd had a drink. It was time.

Icarus Tremens

I jerked awake: A child was crying. Sarah was already hurrying across the room, calling, "I'm here, sweetie." When she threw open the door, the little girl was standing outside, one arm clutching a blanket to her chest, the other fist rubbing her eyes. She stared at me. I slumped back onto the pillow. The sudden jolt seemed to have torn something loose in my side. It felt like a small animal with sharp teeth was trying to eat its way out. Sarah pulled her daughter close, cooing and soothing. I could almost feel the warmth of skin on skin; it made me shiver. Through the windows, I sensed the first pre-dawn lightening of the sky. The pain behind my eyes was in rhythm with my pulse. My nostrils were caked almost shut, my throat aching dry and sore. I could not have slept more than two hours.

Sarah led Allison back to bed. She settled between us, staring down, her child's face tired and stubborn. The blanket was wadded tightly against her cheek, as if she were shielding herself from me. But then she looked at me owlishly.

"I know you," she said.

"I know you too." I tried to sound playful, but the words came out a croak.

"How come you've been gone so long?"

"I've been working."

"Mommy works, and she stays here." A faintly smug look came into Sarah's eyes.

I said only, "This is different."

Allison's mouth moved to form another question, but Sarah reached out quickly to smooth back her hair. "Why don't you go downstairs and get yourself some cereal, babe? I'll be down in a minute." The child turned to stare at me again, this time with outright accusation.

"Give Kevin a kiss," Sarah commanded. Reluctantly, she pushed her closed lips against the side of my face. I hugged her with one arm, and for that instant, the contact of the warm little body seemed to underline every chance I had ever missed. I patted her shoulder awkwardly and lay back.

"Allie," Sarah said. Slowly, she climbed out of bed. She walked across the floor without looking back, blanket trailing the floor, and left the door open behind her.

"You should have seen yourself last night," Sarah said.

As if the words burst open a gate, a flood of images swept through my mind. A skinny woman with bad teeth and big breasts, loose beneath a tank top, next to me at the bar. Tables slick with beer, covered with empty bottles and cigarette ashes. Rock music booming from refrigerator-sized speakers, rattling the glasses in the rack. Housecats in chrome and leather, pretending to be bikers. A butterfly tattooed halfway down her right breast; thick, tantalizing nipples. Her knowing gaze sliding out from under mine as she smiled and raised the drink I bought her. A clone with a baseball cap and mustache, rising suddenly from a table, putting his arm around her and staring at me, trying to look menacing. Her pulling away from him in irritation.

Sarah was sitting up straight, looking at me, her lips compressed. The pounding in my head was hard and steady. I squeezed my eyes shut. That bar was in Sacramento. Sarah had pulled the Jack Daniel's bottle from my hand when she found me on her porch in the Sierra foothills, nearly sixty miles away. How I made the drive, I had no idea.

Her fingers touched my chest. I opened my eyes. "Sorry," she said quietly. "It's too early in the morning to be getting on your case. But you scared the absolute hell out of me. I didn't even know who you were at first."

From the kitchen came a faint, timid, "Mommy?"

"You stay here and sleep some more," Sarah said firmly. "I'll get her on the bus and come back." I watched her walk to her closet and slip on a robe the deep, rich color of wine.

"Kevin," she said. Her voice sounded far away, coming to me through a filter of exhaustion and faulty connections, but I could hear the strain in it. "Are you going to stay this time?"

Casually shift weight and separate feet. Line up two shots with my elbow, first to the solar plexus, second to the bridge of the nose. Where you from? over my shoulder.

Eyes hot under the cap brim: What's it to you?

Just wondering. You look like this cock sucker I used to see in the City. *Watch the blood drop from his face, the girl step back in alarm. You ever hang around the City?*

Sarah was waiting in the doorway, holding the jamb with one hand. I nodded. "I quit," I said, hearing the thickness in my own voice. Her shape blurred as I let my eyes close again.

It might have been seconds or hours later that I opened my eyes again. The light in the room was an indeterminate gray. In spite of my exhaustion, or because of it, I understood that there would be no more sleep for me. I rolled to the edge of the bed, again felt the clutch in my ribs.

Feet sticking to the sultry street. Crowd of Mexican kids hooting in front of a liquor store. Rumble of exhaust, shriek of tires, blare of tuneless music. Blurred, cunning faces beneath the harsh argon lights. A fat woman with a rose between her tits, leering from a doorway. Turn back to the liquor store. Hey, mon, why you don gimme a dollar. Unreal.

I pulled on jeans and shirt, went into the bathroom, rinsed my face, scrubbed away the trickle of blood beneath my nose. My teeth hurt when I brushed them. I walked quietly downstairs. As I crossed the living room, I spotted the Daniel's bottle on the table. Less than an inch remained. I uncapped it and sniffed. The pungent oak smell twisted my insides.

"Come on, Allie, you're going to make us both late," I heard Sarah say in the kitchen. Her voice was full of tried patience. Allie whined something in reply. I sipped furtively. The whiskey hurt my teeth too, and I had trouble keeping it down, but in a few seconds the burning gentled to a glow. I inhaled and stretched my shoulders.

Outside, a horn honked. "Christ," Sarah hissed. I quickly tipped the bottle, draining it, and dropped it into a wastebasket. The liquor rose in my brain like a soft explosion. When I walked into the kitchen, they both looked at me in surprise. Sarah was pulling coatsleeves around Allie's arms. Allie was not helping.

"Couldn't sleep," I said. I went past them to the coffeepot on the stove, wishing I had saved some of the whiskey. Straight coffee was going to be rough, and I could stand neither sugar nor milk.

Sarah gave the coat lapels a final tug and said brightly. "Come on, I'll race you to the door." It was more like a wrestling match. I watched, wishing I could do something to help—wishing I felt easier around children. They were like a foreign life form to me. Maybe it would be different if the child were my own.

Maybe it was just one more thing I would get used to.

A small, hastily built fire was struggling in the living room stove. The house was not cold; the stove seemed out of place, unnecessary. I unhooked the grate and rearranged the embers. By the time Sarah came back in, flames were beginning to leap and crackle. I stood close, feeling the backs of my jeans get hot. She dropped into a chair, looking worn.

She was a nurse, had put herself through school and raised Allie alone after the father abandoned her, while she was still pregnant. More than once in those days, dinner for the two of them had come from the dumpsters behind Safeway. She was smart, and tough, and warm, and practical, and nurturing—all the things that I was not.

I held up my cup.

"God, please," she said. In the kitchen, I mixed cream with the coffee, the way I knew she liked it. When I gave it to her, she smiled thanks. Her fingers brushed mine.

"The morning battle," Sarah said. "After I get her off, I have just about enough time to eat a piece of toast and get dressed. It's not usually this bad, though. She's not used to having a man around." The top of her robe fell open as she leaned forward to set the cup on the floor.

"Neither am I," she said.

I swallowed against the hollow burning that touched the back of my throat, and looked over to the windows. The day had begun.

"I thought I told you to stay in bed," she said, toying with her belt.

"I thought you had to go to work."

"I can be late. I'll call in. The super owes me a couple."

She spoke dreamily, gazing into the fire. Then her fingers slid down the insides of the robe, laying it open. She stretched out and let her head sink back onto the chair.

My gaze moved over her soft, no longer young, mother's body, and the loneliness in the lines of her face. As surely as I had gone to the whiskey, I moved to stand behind her. My fingers touched her cheeks, lips, and then drifted down, her own hands guiding. I shivered, hard, and inhaled as if it were the first breath I had drawn in months.

"I'd better get going," she whispered.

I lay on my back, one arm behind my head, the other around Sarah. Drained, warm, and safe, I had been drifting toward an honest sleep, coaxed by the memory of her murmured, "God that's good."

She sat up and rumbled my hair. "We're going to have to see about getting you a job, a steady one. I'll ask around. I know everybody in this town."

I stared at the room's vaulted cedar ceiling, automatically noting details of the finish work.

"Don't you ever want anything you can't have, Sarah?" I said.

"What do you mean?" She sounded puzzled. "What can't I have?"

"Things that are out of reach. Like when your old man took off after he'd knocked you up, and you couldn't get him back. Didn't that make you crazy?"

"That was the best thing that ever happened to me," she said, with a hard tone. "He was a shit."

"Maybe you didn't mind with your brain. But in your heart, your guts, didn't you feel like clenching your fists and screaming? Not even because you'd been fucked over, but because—you were so helpless."

Her fingers stopped moving on me, and she stared off through the window. "No," she finally said. "I never thought of it like that. Things just happen the way they do. If you try hard enough, you get what you want, and you're stupid to worry about anything else. I mean, what else is there? I was sick of being poor, of living the way I did, and I decided I wouldn't any more. It took a while, and I'm not saying it was easy, but I did it. Now I've got a good job and I own this house, and dammit, Allie's going to go to *Stanford*."

"But suppose," I said, "what you really wanted was something you couldn't get with school or money or anything like that."

"I can't think of much of anything you couldn't get if you really, really tried. Just set your mind on it, figure out what you have to do, and go get it."

I began to give in to the fog that swirled through my brain.

"Like what?" I heard her say. "What is it you think you can't get?"

"I want to grow wings," I said. "I'd fly to the sun."

"Well," she said hesitantly. "You're too old to be an astronaut, but if you quit drinking so much, you could get a pilot's license."

I let my eyes close, let the drift of throbbing stupor carry me. She touched my cheek. With effort, I looked. She was smiling, with something dark and pained far back in her gaze.

"You used to make me laugh," she said. She leaned over and kissed my forehead, then swung her legs out of bed.

For a long time I listened to sounds that should have been comforting, of her moving through the house: running water, the clink of pans in the kitchen, firm footsteps on the hardwood floors. I was barely awake when she looked in on me one last time, but I feigned sleep.

When I went downstairs twenty minutes later, a grocery list and a note lay on the dining room table, in the precise spot where the whiskey bottle had stood.

I drove to the market determined to sober up. The streets wound through a bewildering network of cul-de-sacs and circles, with names like Elendil Drive and Buckleberry Lane. The houses were new, clean, similar in design. I had built dozens of them. Gleaming, sensible cars waited in driveways. Yards were carefully kept, flowerbeds and gardens bursting with life. When I was younger, autumn had filled me with a sense of promise.

In my first summer of framing in the California valleys, I had driven a great deal, trying to escape the flatlands and endless sunshine, the cropped hair and perspiration and sullen afternoon exhaust fumes. One September weekend, in this town in the hills, I had smelled a thunderstorm, and found my way to the end of a deserted dirt road. There I sat for two hours, sipping beer while the rain poured around me—as close to content as I could remember being. I came back to the town again and again; and though I found no more rain, I finally found Sarah; and I had wasted nearly three years for both of us, forcing her to do the impossible; compete with a memory.

Inside the store, I thought of the long day ahead, waiting for her to get home from work. I needed to sleep; coffee would only make that impossible. I convinced myself that not buying whiskey would be a moral victory, and threw a twelve-pack into the cart, along with a can of V-8, to add the rationale of ingesting vitamins. The store seemed filled with bag ladies and kids with stringy hair and empty eyes. The man ahead of me in line had a greasy ducktail, long sideburns, green chino pants, and a key ring that would have opened Fort Knox. Why did those guys always wear green pants? The clerk snapped chewing gum, asked me if I played bingo, and seemed to take it personally when I said I did not.

Back in Sarah's kitchen, I mixed my first red beer before I put away the groceries. My head still hurt. I ate four aspirin, but knew that while they might ease the headache, they would do nothing for the blood vessels too close to the surface of my eyeballs, or the pool of acid in my stomach that rose halfway to my throat each time I swallowed. As I raised the glass, I wondered dimly at what point I had accepted this as a normal part of my life. I drank, and walked to the living room. Through the window, I could see my truck. It did not look right in the driveway.

I stretched out on the couch. Its leather was cool against my skin. An ember popped in the fire. The new smell of the couch was foreign. I closed my eyes and imagined that I was lying in the back of the Power Wagon, lined with old sleeping bags that smelled like me.

As I turned onto my side, my hand dropped to the floor and sought the comfort of the glass. Fingers curled loosely around it, I gave in at last to the brother of death.

It was not just the space, not just the snowy mountains everywhere, not just the way the buck-brush bleached to the color of wheat in the fall, and the willows went dark red along the rivers, turning the water green as an uncut emerald, green as Beth's eyes; not just sitting high behind the wheel, skimming through that northern country heavy with forest, barren of cities; or the bars crowded with cowboys hooting and yelling over the wail of a country band; or quiet bars with half a dozen solitary men, sharing something beyond speech or acquaintance as another afternoon the color of slate died into evening; or driving home from a job, dirty and unshaven, clothes stiff with the wet blue muck of early spring, bones aching with the good fatigue of true work; or just driving, across mile after mile of snow frozen so hard it glistened blue under the stars, without another vehicle or moving thing until the first pink streaks of the late winter dawn began to show in the rearview mirror and you were still not even close to where you were going.

Even her skin had smelled different.

When I awoke, the fire had gone out. The light in the room suggested some vague point in mid-afternoon. Though it was warm now, I automatically knelt before the kindling box.

Then, as my fingers touched the iron on the stove, I raised my head and listened. It was like a call dying on the wind, but it sounded for no one else. For half a minute, I remained crouched, the feel of the metal on my fingertips like an icy electric shock, my eyes focused absurdly on the intricate mosaic of stones that lined the wall above the hearth.

"All right," I said. I rose and began to walk.

Sarah had left me a list of instructions for starting dinner. I turned it over and picked up a pen. But there was nothing words could add to what she would see in the empty driveway—to what she, what both of us, had really known all along.

From a hidden compartment beneath the driver's seat, I took a vial full of Black Beauties and crosstops. I ate one of the Beauties, washed it down with a swallow of beer, and put two of the whites in my shirt pocket. What was left in my apartment, I didn't figure I'd be needing.

The inside of the truck was hot; the steering wheel burned my palms lightly and the back of my shirt stuck to the seat. I rolled down the windows and once more began the long drive north, into the cooler air of night.

"Sweat," "White Midas," and "Icarus Tremens" are from Neil McMahon's *Journeyman*.



photo by: William Pitt Root

The Minotaur: lithograph by James G. Davis

James G. Davis is an internationally-known painter and print-maker who teaches at the University of Arizona in Tucson. In addition to one-man exhibits throughout the United States, Mr. Davis made his European debut this year in Berlin, Germany. His work is permanently collected at many museums, including the Phoenix Art Museum and the Tucson Museum of Art. He lives and works in Oracle, Arizona.

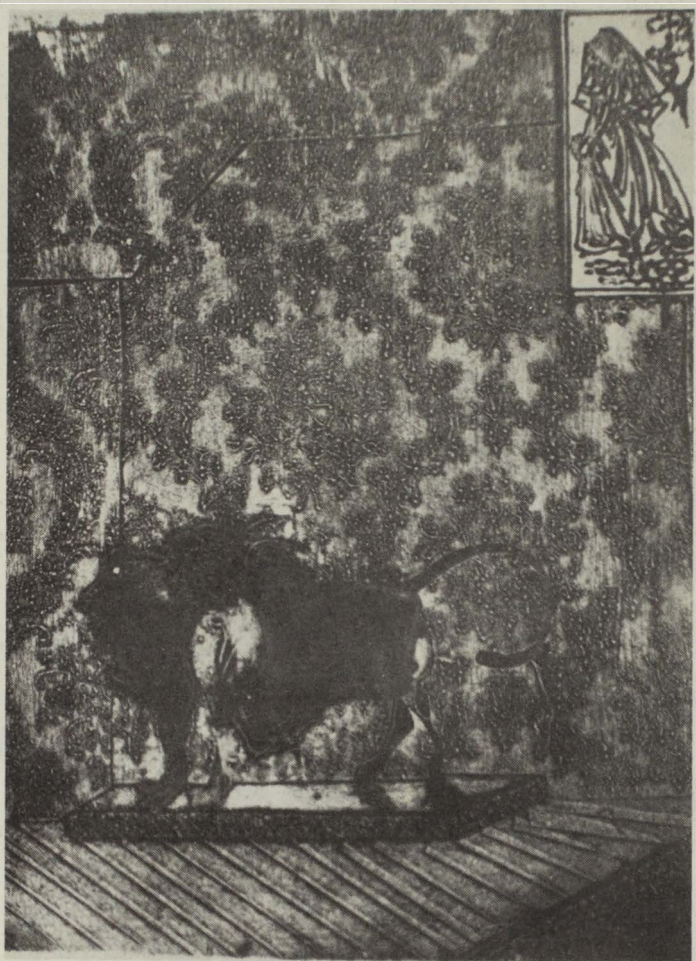


photo by: William Pitt Root

Attic: lithograph by James G. Davis



photo by: William Pitt Root

Hunter: lithograph by James G. Davis

Cypresses

Pulled by the roots from a hot Southern town
 where we unfolded like geraniums, grafted
 to the icy bayside of a Northern wilderness—
 fast cars, fast girls, fast tongues!—
 we fasted till your asthma kicked up and the very air
 slid through the bellows of your lungs.
 At knife point once you gave up your allowance.
 I dyed my hair and applied lipstick with a vengeance
 and let the boys come, I didn't care.
 You were summer's fair-haired boy.
 You would rather be funny than smart. All night
 at your blond violin, playing the same tune over again,
 getting it right: the ode to joy you understood
 at fourteen, and finally got right, all of us
 yelling at you to *shut up*. At seventeen you went under,
 went into the trees in your new Triumph. I've gone
 back South once or twice, though you never will.
 The last time I sat at Cafe du Monde
 I watched the pigeons swirl like a cape
 around Jackson's horse, in Jackson's square,
 sky gilded like a rococo sky, a place
 like any other to tell the truth—
 perhaps more pink. I went to Pierre Park
 and the labyrinthine channels of water,
 now empty of significance. Near Audubon
 where the silted river slides to the sea
 with its cargo of Northern sorrows, I saw cypresses
 hanging their hair in the park's charred light.
 Now you come to me in dreams and tell me, *it's too cold*,
 though the long roots of the trees wrap you round
 and wind blows warm from the Gulf.

Madras Insomnia

Struck head-on by the wind's blow,
two trees hum like tuning forks.
The sky's colander drains off
water from the stars while a parrot
sharpens its voice. A lone peacock
sputters in the dark.

I can't sleep under the fan's blades.
Saffron geckos cling upsidedown,
chirping and chirping for gnats.
Mosquitos unzip themselves from the wall.
Even the bee-eaters' slender tongues
untie their knots.

Outside, a banyan tree sinks its hooks
into an acre of dust. In the blue hills
langurs leaf, through green crops,
and water buffalo sink into mud.
Spirals of light cling to night's ribs.
White ants spill out of bark.

I wish for the sleep of clear rivers,
for the midnight dreams of saints,
I wait to enter another realm where
one flame dances eternally on one toe:
where the bride of heaven sings a single note,
and the king cobra's hood cups the world.

The Stories We Know

Sara, there's nothing here of my own.
Until today, a bank of weeds masked
The front of the house, and its rotting basements.
A young woman worked, cutting the stalks.
It's not because of her that I think of you,
But because I'm alone; and weeds,
Great felled forests of over-sized daisy
And thistle, cover the yard.
A lizard, quick as its own tongue,
Hurries from shadow to shadow in hopes
That somewhere shelter exists.
I'm not quick or willing
Enough to try to catch its neon tail,
Which, I've learned, it would leave
In my hand, barter for its escape.

The friendship of women is easy to understand.
Whenever I go to my true home,
The one I claim, I go to you,
And the rank apartment stinking of catpiss;
And the furniture draped with your uniforms;
And your shoes like broken toys all over the floor;
And the box of cereal open and stale
On the radiator; and the Scrabble scores
On envelopes, with yours forever highest
Because you love to cheat;
And the dozens of plants campaigning for water
With an ominous dropping of leaves;
And books on the shelves from classes
That we took together, starved
For the love of our desperate teachers;
And the name of your brother,
Which is everywhere but mostly unspoken
Because he took his own life.
Once I thought a photo of him

Was of you at an awkward age.
Because I didn't know, I laughed.
Because in my foolishness I hurt you,
His story became my business,
The details my duty to keep.

Stories are secrets that fell from grace,
From the elegance of the heart's solitude.
The older we grow, the less we work
To find out things that once we wept to uncover—
And we were a team, ransacking.
We stayed out of each others' way.
Now you say: *Let it be known what we found.*
I'd like to have back our conspiracies,
Our peerless confidence born of fear.
But we faltered. We began to grow up.
Now it's plain that the scratching we hear
At the unlocked window is only an elm
In need of pruning, or a sparrow come down
From confusing heights and lost
For a moment on earth. We're no longer
At the center of things, and if we're now
Less visible, we're warm with the jostling
Of crowds around us. We're closer

To the unwashed heavens, yet we're still
Ourselves, discrete, a thousand miles between us.
That is what stars feel, pulsing strongly
Against a deep black background. Sara,
I've never wanted many friends.
I've longed to be one of your blood kin,
With your bad dental records
And sturdy bones. And I've longed
To stop aging or simply to die young,
But painlessly, like a watch left outdoors
On a damp night, or a canvas
With the figure of a lovely girl

Blocked in, and set aside.
 On the phone you tell me that in the past weeks
 You've been moved to tears
 By in consequence—a story overheard
 While waiting in line, of a boy
 Questioned by police on crimes
 About which he knew nothing.
 I tell you all the stories I know.
 Most of them you've heard already.
 They sound like jokes in comparison
 To the one that flickered from a distant source
 Like a star burning out in sorrow.
 When the weeds take root again, I'll dream
 Of every acre on earth they claim,
 And then I'll come and tell you.
 I'll know how to make us both laugh.

Crosspollination—

Some times it takes a bee
to make the clover sing.
Other times wind brings golden
grain. Someone once thought
it clever to put paper bags
in tall corn and that corn grew
taller until its ears could;
hear dancing stars.

Tonight, it's warm. I listen
for tiny voices light years
send our way before the loud
moon can rise with her full
song. Someone is playing
a radio. It crackles static
around the flapper tune Mother
used to hum under her breath
whenever Father was gone.

Portent

Waxwings, four on a branch,
passing berries to each other,
their gray-brown bodies hard in the sun,
the blood-bright berries.

Around the birds are thorns,
white-spiked, red-tipped.
It is 1969 again, in the garden
of the Shah of Iran—

eyes black-masked,
a globe of blood in each mouth,
and I'm being told they are
not known for their singing.

Apartheid

The police placed white crosses
on the houses they had cleared,
the people who were cleared
received little white crosses.

*Trust us, the crosses said,
we are your friends.*
One girl, about thirteen,
wearing hers as a necklace,

looked up at her mother.
The white cross kissed her flesh
the way a maggot would,
or an obscene notion.

It held on to her life,
it rose and fell with her breath.
It had its own motion.

at the corner of grant and clay

*following the massacre at the
golden dragon restaurant*

stooped chinese men sit
leaning against a brick wall
lined with slats of wood
the same men wearing tai chi
slippers holding pipes and canes
who sit there daily

some swing their bony legs
from higher elevations and chat
pleasantly with each other
while a block away in the park
at kearney people i don't recognize
gather like the pigeons

it is rush hour when i pass by
standing aboard the fifty-five
yet chinatown is quiet
except for a few shopkeepers
keen at setting up displays
of bok choy and ginger

across the street fruit pies
are being stacked in the window
of an oriental bakery
and a laundry has opened
early for business

throughout this neighborhood
restaurants prepare for dim sum
setting up tables and taking reservations
and as the bus continues downtown
where the streets begin to level off

i imagine how many pork buns
will be eaten that afternoon

The First Photographer

Nothing seems far from this imprecision,
a dismantled privacy,
one man's view. The first photographer, idling
at an upstairs window, invented a freedom
from the backstreet he must have loved
even as it resisted all ownership. His half-shut eyes
must sometimes have blurred things just as the camera did,
perspective becoming the time light takes
to touch an object incompletely,
without any jealousy: floating in nature,
these images won't be fixed.

What he chose in these shadows
was not a recognition but a loss
of focus, a moment let go beyond itself
where buildings stretch outside the camera's scope.
I look for a way to feel
about his view, about anything.
Occasionally a hot stillness drenches my own windowsill,
the blue vase, the small giraffe emerging
clumsily from its mottled wood.

When this moves into that, I try taking it
lightly: if I sit here long enough,
everything changes. The sun is so careful
not to remember or neglect each detail separately.
Nothing will prevent me from moving
toward another, transfigured emotion
I haven't learned yet,
toward all the simplicity I've thought about,
toward my thoughts,
until exhaustion,
until the moment.

Consummation

A tincture of flame hems the wedding dress: aura
testing innocence, particle
hung in the bride's cheek.
From her feet a blush will climb a geometric stair
to a caloric, serial heaven. Better
to marry than to burn, they tell him.
She doesn't see Cunegunda walking
the redhot ploughshares, rescuing herself
from branding shames, doesn't think of being
eaten alive, or, alive, of taking forever
the fire's name. She knows that everything that enters
holds its peace, is married utterly
in tongues.

Whether to be changed slowly or quickly,
to be lit up like a book or a terrace of roses
in a bonfire, to be the flash in the sky or the heart.
The secret of its ability to instruct lies in its willingness
to contradict itself: bad fire; good fire; now comfort
and now apocalypse.

Stirring the soup she doesn't think of St. Francis
before the Saracens or of the three in the furnace
proving their love or of the sexual habits
of the pyromaniac.

She's thinking how the soup must love the vegetables
to take them in its arm and count their perfect numbers,
arriving at their square roots, adding them
to itself until they are invisible as it, supreme;
she's thinking that somewhere in the world
Jerusalem and Troy go up perpetually in holocaust,
that Ixion turns forever on his flaming wheel,
secure, an offering.

She'll serve the consome, finished and clear,
a wheel of lemon floating on it,
and think about colorless ash, transparent broth,
the salamander incognito in his fires.

Poem in Two Parts

THE SKETCH THING

When he sketched
It wasn't like the world disappeared
It was more like the thing inside
That made him want to
Stab the goldfishes' eyes with the tooth-market pencil
And watch them bleed tiny flopping deaths
Across the tabletop

Instead

Crawled out onto his page
Quirking the corners of the Blackfeet woman's mouth
Hooking the bull-elk's antler tips
Content then, smirking up at him.

The thing had even squirmed onto
The Jesus-picture his mother had cooed over
And crucified on the refrigerator door with magnet-nails.

She startled once, after a few minutes'
Deep study of the Jesus-picture.
He'd drawn the eyes unopened
And the something that snickered between the closed lids
Peeked after you'd stared awhile.

He knew that.

But he didn't tell her that sometimes,
When the Jesus-eyes opened to him
They narrowed
Searching for the tooth-pocked pencil
He held tight behind his back.

ACTIVITIES: NONE

Screwing the old woman was like
Doing it with a box of dusty Kleenex
I was high on incredibly good shit
And her house looked good from
Outside in the dog-pissed drifts.

They found her blood
Trailed it to me
So I spent some time in the cell next to Vern
Underneath the whole fucking courthouse
Of Conrad, Montana
Had my sketch-book and a chewed-up pencil.
They all scrambled above me,
Fat white grubs.

Third or fourth day
Vern's girlfriend pulls a .357 Magnum
On the dispatcher and that fat-ass deputy and
Vern says "You comin'?"
So I picked up my sketches and went
Laughing, ready for a road-trip.

Her beat-up Datsun leaked air at eighty
Vern drove, I rode shotgun
Just like some fucking F.B.I. show.
she crawled small in a corner
Didn't say much, looked scared
Like the dispatcher when the Mag. was up her snout.

The Datsun got us to the reservation that night,
Pulled over five miles south of Babb.
Under the nosy bastard moon
I got a good tight grip on her throat
Bandanna-gagged her

And she spread her legs for me then
While Vern slept in the front seat
Cradling the Magnum instead of her.

She screamed like I'd killed her
When I took off the gag
Vern woke up and I made it out the door and
One
Two-three
Lurchy steps
Before the bullet gnawed
My ribs
Sat back
While five more followed.

Sprawled out now, face-down
So cold
The snow's sucking mouthfuls of my blood
Red on white
Red on red, and
It isn't funny anymore

Until
I think about all those dumb
White kids who'll be amazed
they walked the same halls with
a genuine bad-ass Injun.

And the girls' faces, pale
Like when they're swimming
In five feet of water at Tiber Dam
And a rattler curves past their thighs
Yeah, that's me

can't even see the goddamn stars

But
White boy on the sand
Pitches a rock, pegging
my back my head

and the rattler sinks
slowly into dark

Snow-cold water

And touches bottom
But doesn't
Know it

Flint and Stone

This small rock spent random centuries rolling
to the thrust and push of countercurrents
where sea-going stream met sea-mass moving
toward the shore.

Then the slow upthrust of the earth
as it formed the backbone of the Rockies
exposed the stone, a small ocean egg left
to hatch on a barren hillside.

Our ancestors are all around me here.
I feel the distant vibrations
of the drum and hear the high, clean
voices of the singers in the wind.

At my feet I find a wedge of flint, a thin,
sharp-edged flake sheared when a man leaned
down his careful weight, transmitting it
to the parent stone through the rounded point
of a staghorn.

The chip must have hit the ground like thunder
for the sound of it to roll up the vast silence
of the arroyos and across the centuries to reach
my ears, just now.

Riding Double: 16 & Beating The Heat

—For James Dickey

*She loved my black Triumph
motorcycle, flamed orange
and chromed, my Brando jacket,
all nine zippers half-unzipped—
leather and chesthair
her long-nailed fingers prowled
like barracuda. Doing 95
through a 92 degree wave,
I loved her breasts
flexed and churning
into the muscles of my back,
loved our flesh-and-metal duet, sheer
defiance of double yellow lines
between us and the abandoned
dancehall we roared to
to quell our heat. In rebellion
against all law—mortal or God's,
death to gravity—we staked the physical
against pure physics. We throttled
wide open, torrid on lust, hopped-up
on the 4-stroke's solo
double-tongued through straightpipes,
fired on 2 bits worth of fuel. Hell,
we made our own damn breeze,
we kamikazed the heat, our fevers
breaking into youth's oblivion cool.*

Hunting Pheasants in Lehigh County

I am here as last year and the year before,
climbing the dirt road past wild grapes
toward the high fields, with the spaniel
moving back and forth in front of me
and cold wind down my collar.
The afternoon is gray and blue,
the stream silver as it enters the ravine.

I enter grass higher than my head
and stop to listen to it,
to the far-off cries of crows.
All afternoon it is woods and hedgerows,
red berries, thorns catching sleeve and hat.
The birds run ahead of us
and it is not frailty that stops me from circling
down to the overgrown orchard where they roost,
then hunting back into their confusion.
It is something else settling beneath brushpile
or furrow in this long afternoon
as I move among the names of autumn,
seedbox, pinweed, enchanter's nightshade,
all the intricate accidents of time drying.

Sailor

No matter how strange the country
one grows accustomed. Evenings long after sunset
he puts out to sea on my bed of stars, bed of nails.
He passes a moon where the sea foam settled as dust.
He goes places Utopia's a girl: the woman
not there. Heart of language, center of love.
Some climates, green in the midst of fire
and the rain-bearded cloud, he looks into her eyes
as you were before you existed. Wherever she walks
he follows your step. It comes down into sunrise,
vanishing just as I step ashore, an island
whose sole living creature lies down to sleep,
to love, to die; yet one grows accustomed
no matter how strange the country.

Mendeltna Creek: Down From Old Man Lake

Morning. Four small clouds breaking
trail across the horizon. The air
chill now, caught between fireweed
and frost. The timid sun poking
around the eastern sky—he can
afford uncertainty at this latitude.

You can't. You, whatever you do,
keep on. There may be a tundra lake
covered with ducks, lake trout up
in the shallows spawning, a cow
moose standing in the willows along
the creek, dark and huge. Or maybe
nothing in hundreds of miles but
black spruce, the humping hills,
muskeg bog after muskeg bog, ponds
reflecting sky, the cowardly sun,
lost and lying to himself that
nothing more will ever change.

Odd-Man-Out

Hawks wheel across the reservoir,
making silence of everything
not part of their courtship,

keening sharply toward the water,
daring the sun to melt their wax,
diving upward, tumbling back.

Five *tobi* challenge my disgust
for a land long quarried dry
of anything that can't migrate.

Three in the air, two in pines:
black-eared kites courting fate,
odd-man-out to catch a mate.

twilight performance

Clarence O'Malley
 at it in the alley,
 pulls fat rabbit out of hat,
 when he says "abracadabra"
 it sounds like "buy me a drink";
 he lives
 to dillydally
 with Millie
 at Pinky's Grill
 & needs some scratch for exactly that,
 Clarence continues,
 puts his hat back on his crossfire head,
 waves his hand
 rabbit evaporates
 "how'd you do that, Clancy," someone asks,
 "easy," he replies, "was never there, fancy, huh?"
 & checks his watch, & hesitates,
 & gets itchy,
 suddenly Clarence snaps fingers,
 presto, rabbit on his head, & wearing hat,
 this gleans a few quarters,
 not even close,
 he needs at least a 5-spot,
 wants to take her to the Helsinki later,
 hopes she ain't bitchey,
 hopes Lucky & jerky, jukebox & dreams,
 snaps fingers again,
 rabbit turns hat into Sacred Heart Church,
 few more quarters,
 he can see her gorgeous face,
 he can taste the Lucky,
 checks his watch, scratches his nose,
 "is it 8 yet?", someone asks,
 Clarence pulls rabbit out of rabbit
 & says, "I guess so", his voice a zombie's;

after counting his money
he sells his watch for 3 bucks,
then dives into the hat,
both disappearing like burning masks
or turquoise exhaust from fire trucks

rabbit hops,
Big Dipper brightens

Ruth, Mt. Tabor Nursing Home, 1972

The nurses can ignore a bed
but not the pink-faced cries
of a woman who screams
each afternoon to the bone.
Where are your children, Ruth?
Are they embarrassed
whose silence you cannot bear
from the photograph in your useless purse?
They have become the vacancy
of plastic flowers.

I am just a boy who mops
the ice-tea spilled, and urine
threading towards the door.

Sometimes I hear my father
muttering little dust-sounds
to himself in the basement,
among the wrenches his hands
have warmed, among the boxed histories
of his blood, and a mattress
that helped make my still-born brother.

I am afraid when the dying won't use words.

A Rosy Future

Our house is broken. Blackened boards
stick oddly from the rubble of bricks,
cracked chairs, ripped mattress, shattered glass.
A magenta haze settles in, smoke
drenched by a fine blood-mist. In this
spring the cities flowered into pain
and death. Man was the un-maker.
Our house, I can see, like the others
smolders. I don't want to search scorched
bricks and boards. I can see part
of the dog's carcass, charred; wife
and children . . . ruin. No desire. Turn
to face the hot wind, know
the dry contempt of that rosy glow.

The Detention Camp

(a poem for a book published under censorship)

Among these lines of poetry
Are patches of white
Surrounded by barbed wire

Inside the whiteness strangers and friends
Walk around in a circle

Titles commandeered into watchtowers
Where the sentries keep one eye on the prisoners
And one finger tapping on their guns

translated by Daniel Bourne

Not Old Russia

Here is my father
with his jars
and tiny brushes,
leaning over
the chipped ikon
he smuggled out
of Leningrad.
He tells me
this Midwestern
light calls to mind
the light of some
former studio, gone
two hundred years.
He hasn't the eye
for this kind of work,
and when he is done—
tomorrow or next week—
St. George will hang
on a papered wall,
wet and not quite
the original color.
We will go out
along Duff Avenue
with our umbrellas,
after snow, and forgive
all manner
of imperfection.
At the end of the block
the big white sign
over The Grove
will flicker on,
drawing attention
to the walnut sky,
and he will laugh,
"That's the color
I was looking for."

First Spring on Roosevelt Drive

1.

The morning the spotted calf was born
our mother who wore one-inch bows in her hair,
 who crowded into size seven shoes,
 saying it was the width she took,
 not the length,
our mother who looked away when the neighbor
 lady nursed a baby
that morning mother stared at the cow Dad
bought cheap because she was too old to breed.

The old cow's flanks wet mother's head, bent
to nipples, caked and pink as tainted meat.
And she lit into the house, scrubbed her clean
linoleum, dark hair touching breasts, bound tight
as the round cheeses kept in the wellhouse.

2.

Outdoors, we heard mother stoke the stove.
She marched to the chicken coop then, grabbed
the oldest hen,
 gripping its neck in one hand,
 swinging clockwise twice
 until the twist and easy give.
And she tossed the head, letting the rest
 of the chicken run.

Mother dipped the dirtied hen in a scalding
pot, singed each wing hair. Then two sweeps
into the naked cavity, and we saw the clump
of yellow eggs she'd been reaching for.

For lunch, mother mixed the last powdered milk,
set out brown bread and the stewing hen. She cut
the rubbery eggs, ate each herself, saying
only the old cow would come fresh in a day or two.

Desire

Hunger. Nothing satisfies the eye
enough. Heron, spruce, a blue

isolated cove lures like a net.
The world is bait, the eye

a snare. Act as an animal would,
step timidly into this circle

of rough tide and ripe grass.
Do you believe I am malicious,

that the delicate creature
sees itself as prey? A couple

glides by in a swelled-up boat.
They note rapture in the trees;

they witness the shore as they do
the fog—all depth and possibility—

as if the world were a net through
which they slid. We slide

into the world's eye,
which storms only when we want it.

Somewhere Near the Swamp

After the leaves have fallen
he puts on his camouflage outfit
and blackens his face with charcoal.
In the car, driving past bonfires,
front yards lit up like war,
he listens to the recorded sounds
of the wild turkey, scraping, sucking
sounds he can feel in his throat
under the wattles of his neck.

Somewhere near the swamp
the wild turkeys are shuffling their heavy bodies
through the brown and silver underbrush
like creatures falling into a deep sleep,
or stones dropping on water.
He can taste the cold on his teeth,
gun metal.
He follows the black snapping branches
that slice the air before him,
the streak of sunset a lantern
disappearing fast.
When that goes there's only the darkness,
his own dull flesh,
bird sounds
looking for a way to get out.

South on the Eel River

for J.B.

1

We map the veins of riverstones,
gently poking skeletons of a mountain
that once rose here,
each white bone a tooth
in the river's history,
the furious current curving,
pivoting from the root,
the river's green roar
promising the sea.

2

Ninety miles inland
cacti push up from rock-soil.
We share what light slips
between manzanita leaves,
listening to the tree's inner chambers where
blind blood seeps upward from
dark root-hairs.

We drink wine,
dream about this manzanita's
mahogany skin.

3

On a moonswept hill, thick grass
pulls on the river's song.
Stones beneath the field speak
of the long sinking,
of rising with the frost.
We are among them—
footsteps, thin
shadows, particles of clay.

Weighing Coal in Oaxaca

Behind the oldest door in the city
which is not a door so much
as a pair of fractured stones,

in a house filled with shadow
works a woman sorting coal.
In the hours before customers come

she digs at the foot of her dark mountain
separating good coal from shake,
weighing the stone that rings

like delicate silver. Tacked to the bin
beneath a patron saint, gilded,
hangs a calendar blackened with dust.

Young women speak kindly to her,
who like a quiet goddess brings
fire to their hearths.

No Moon

The stars are slightly off, like a child's rendering,
Drawing my eyes to etch their lines of canonized beasts;
To hell with proper names and the right numerical order.
I will connect them where I will, make them my own,
Remembering still the history of myths. This preparation
For sleep makes me envious of earlier men who roamed
Arroyos in search of mastadons. I picture the bulls
Of Lascaux, remembering well enough from glossy reproductions
Their beautiful attenuated lines that could and couldn't
Have been defined as recently as yesterday. Hidden
For thousands of years beneath Dordogne before a group of boys
In search of their dog discovered them by accident. Drawn
As if from constellations, or to form them, image and reality in
one.

These troglodytes trained their muscular hands to hold
Their brushes with feminine ease, or maybe it was the women
Who stroked these scenes at home, inventing the idea
Of a magical screen on which their narratives betrayed
The chain at least of strong and godly animals.

Lying here now five hundred millenia later, I admit
To myself while you sleep that I cannot put all the fires out
Nor would want to; my father left them burning in the corners
Of my eyes as if for a reason, as if for the stars.
They are eternal discriminating fires.
They are what gives my blood its color.
They are not what makes me American but human,
And you are the same. I stare at the stars before closing
My eyes; now they are sheep who have fallen in a well,
Butchered by counting. The children are asleep nearby,
Breathing like metronomes. Our fidelity is unnatural.
Outside the camp, two gems of animal eyes peer in
At the dying coals, mesmerized and tame. They are harmless
Creatures now, hungry for the hanging food and buried garbage,
Daring enough to trample over us in the middle of the night

With unwitting steps on our thighs and groins.
I look forward to their coming and fall asleep.

Low Tide

March. My mind with its winter bent
ignores the willow catkins, moves
over a ridge of red-flanged birch,
then holds two figures on the shore,
the sharp recoil of falling ice.
Clouds fat with reflected light cruise
like sulfur-bellied northern pike.

December Walk

Only the thick ringed trees
appear above the snow;
marrow-white, bone-dark, one
more ashen day begins.

Our words float before us,
in fine syllabic nets
of frost, discordant notes
in a nocturne for shrews.

Encomium For Cows

The cows maunder forth & back
in the manureslog of winter, their
loins lank & bestrewn with mud:
sodden-mouthed, they say
nothing: as if torn
between emptiness & desire
thick as their bones
to run off:

 to pastureground
idyllic, to a land without ropes
or tetherings, where the grass
grows unguent & vermillion,
where the sky changes in blue allusions
to itself, where
they might say: we are here,
happy, O leave us alone

The Polygamist's Daughter

Three women give birth to me
and I acquire mothers for every holiday.
Some drift in with the paychecks
on Friday nights, hair blown over their eyes,
laughing, leaning on my father's arm
like golden epaulets.
Others come in dark skirts and dusty shoes;
tired by the long walk from the Butte road,
they ask for a drink of water and never leave.
From these, my father takes books with black covers
to turn beyond the west fence,
late at night when the children can't tell
the rising flames from those who watch.

On Sunday nights, my father reads to us.
He begins, *this is a true story*,
and then a look like the sky before snowfall
spreads over his face, trembling
on his mouth, emptiness that fills itself.
The stories are about his mother:
he calls her Ruth, Esther, Rebecca;
he remembers her in a blue dress,
walking ahead of him one summer evening
when she seemed so like a still pool,
so like an ending he was about to reach.
And some days, everywhere he looks, she is there,
walking away, carrying a child,
just ahead of him, a blue dream in the twilight.

An August evening hoards its coolness
in birds, in the tops of trees.
I lie awake in the bed my father made for me,
I look out from the bed of my father's bones
and watch the moon, liquid on my traveling dress.
Tomorrow I am leaving here forever;
tonight the mothers drift into the room,
pressing me close. In the dark,
they are all the same woman,
each whispering from far beneath
her veil of night-colored hair,
telling me of the great, loveless world,
that I will move through it
repeating a name that is not my own,
telling my strange story over and over,
in different voices, with new endings.

Let's Pretend

In her daily games
I am always the bad guy, the wicked witch, the ogre,
the one who hunts her down.
Against me her magic is useless.
She is practising how to defeat death,
how to recognize horror when it comes
like the old woman who crawled into a car
at a convenience market and wasn't an old woman at all
but a young man disguised in thrift store clothes,
his right hand shading an axe.
I worry too much. I believe the statistics.
When I read that one of every 4 girls
and one of every 10 boys will be assaulted
before 14 I feel a disproportionate terror.
The children were always right, knowing
how an old man with a toothsome smile might wish
to devour them, to lick them up like sweet candy,
as if the flesh of children were a gingerbread house.
Go right inside.
Don't say a word.
She admonishes a doll she tucks into a pillow.
Speech gives away her hiding place. She is cultivating
silence.
You should not take the bread of the children
and feed it to dogs but in this century
it is the children who are eaten, ashes
raining on Bavarian towns, clouds for good Christian people.
Sometimes when she realizes her power of escape
and not the threat is the game, she shakes with fury.
grinding her knuckles together,
glaring tigers at me. She runs down the hill
and sulks in the sagebrush and hides her face
in the ruff of her dog and when I see how far she
has gone from the house and remember the two rattlesnakes
we killed last summer and the tarantulas inching along

the path to the animal pens and the black widows
that go hunting at night
I call to her. Be Careful Watch out Pay Attention
to where you are Going
But she cries back
what
what
I can't hear you
Already out of range.

Johannes Brahms Reads The Brothers Grimm

*The composer, on his last day, puts aside his reading
and writes a final appeal to the violinist Joachim,
asking him to destroy the manuscript of Sonatensatz in his possession.*

Vienna, April 1897

My dear Joachim,

I am lying here, caught up in a wolf's body
as surely as any peasant girl on the way to
losing her virtue. Through the window light
reverses direction and the days grow longer.
Behold this man, delirious, hearing music

everywhere, and knowing nothing. You would see
a wolf if you visited me, staring from my bed,
wearing my flesh as good as any disguise I try
to put on. I am not imagining this good German
wolf. I see his face in the night's window glass,

hear him roaming the dark spaces of this country.
He followed the train last May, running hidden
in the trees and the sun's glare the day I came
late for Clara's funeral. Since then, his black
hunger eats inside me. I fear death is not some

far and distant land, but a constant companion.
If you are my friend, you will do for me what
I can no longer do for myself: take the last
meat from the bone, lest it should rot. Burn
that manuscript, so that it might be written:

"He sought the emotional moment of the darkness.
Ecce, lupus. Ecce, homo. He gnawed light like bone."

The Auctioneer

My supple tongue will sell today
tractors, trucks, buckets
of nails and bolts, a piano beaten
by three generations. I will
push the bidding on all
they have gathered around
themselves for sixty years.
should I sell the sweat?
Should I sell the memory
of the dust as it rises from
his overalls when she sweeps
him with the broom? The bidders
will mingle in the barnyard like ghosts
of cattle. The goldfish were washed
from the watering trough in the last
big spring run-off. At the end
of the day I will have new work horses
for the harness hanging on nails in the barn,
a new cow pony for the bridle that once
calmed a nervous Palomino. I'll push
the bid up a dollar for the bed—
the fevers it held are worth something.

My Brothers

I used to steal my brother's stamps
from his secret box in the basement
one-at-a-time from blocks of four,
the rare Colombian two-cent worth five bucks.

There, too, were corporal's stripes,
a medical discharge, some photos, and a letter,
"Dear Arbie, Thanks for the toy soldiers.
Hope to see you Christmas. Love, David."

A simple story. The stamps went for rent.
My brother's dead, the little men lost
last move. I remember days when they
fought wars and won.

Seasonal

1

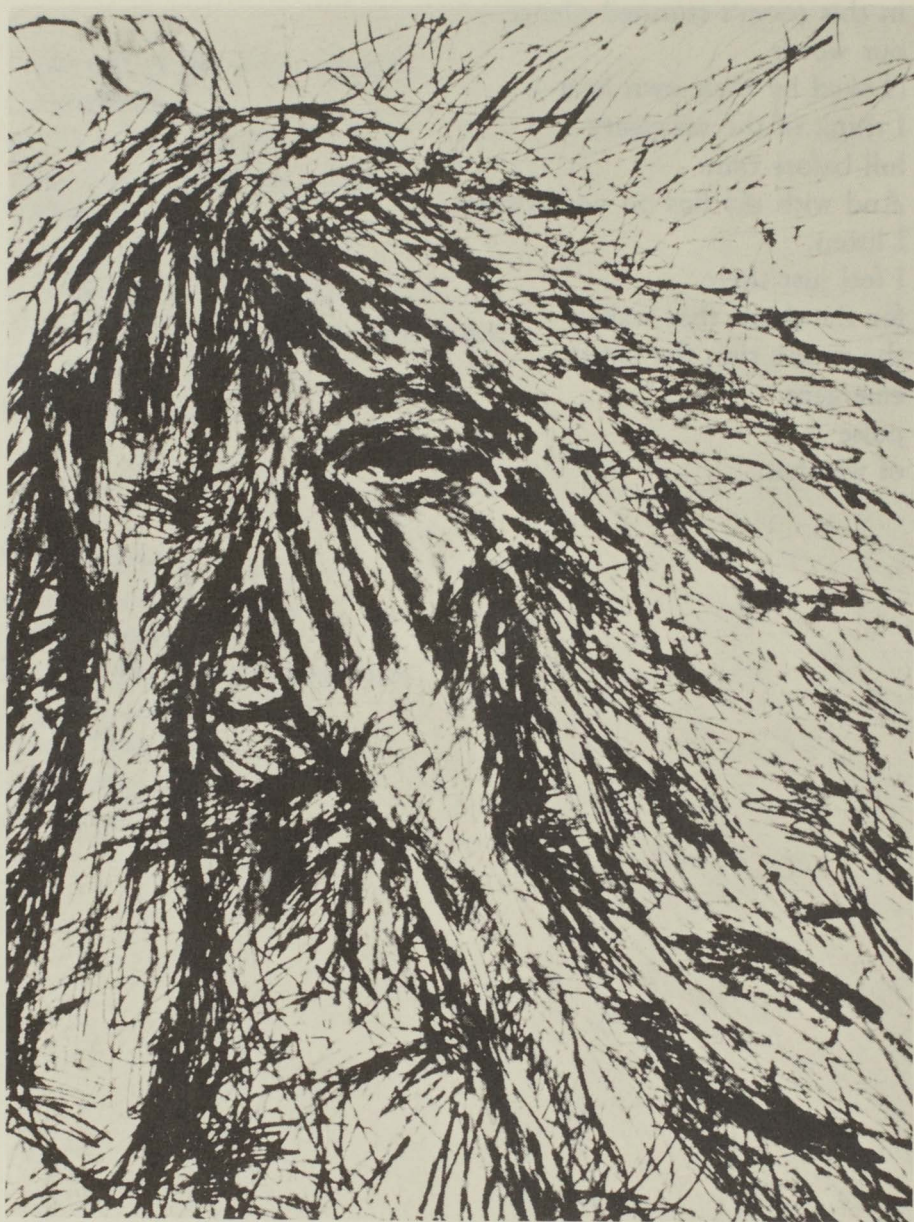
From out of the deep canyons
summer begins
to lift on a new wind.
The cracked riverbed coughs
and moans
in its parched throat.
It is the sound we make,
waking from a bad dream. Our voice
that walks slowly,
out of the caves.

2

In his dream
a man's fretful mouth
opens to cry.
His lips take the rounded form
that just begins
to say "love"
before they sag shut
on the effort.

3

After the argument,
in this room's stunned silence—
our words
choked by their own heat—
I think of the necessary
lull before rain.
And with my lips on your throat
I listen.
I feel just there
for the drum that wakes,
the river's rise, the sweet
emergent
pulse
of weather.



Hiding: cattlemarkers graphite on paper by Chi-Ling Annie Chan

The Moon Year

after Li Ho (791-817)
for Kenneth Rexroth (1905-1982)

poems by Ken Gerner

*The Chinese titles were drawn by
Dr. John B. Wang,
Professor of Chinese
at the University of Montana*

十二月
樂
詞

First Moon

Cross the bed of pine needles,
swing the gate open to spring's coming.
The night is crouched into itself.
The white sun held in its claw.
Bow into this silence, bow to
the demons of winter's barren dreams,
bow to the passing.

A long bubble sucks flat
to the milky tatter of ice
that clings to the stream's bank.
The air sack pulses with the current,
wiggles free, disappears.
The broken pearl of winter's last moon
has set. In the dark, draw
the first cold drink of spring.

Sunlight will come, wake the croci,
open knots of bud to holiday and
seduce the delicate flower of luck.
In its shadow, the tiger
of night will gamble.

Asleep in a cocoon of red silk,
she curls from the cold into herself.
The shadow to flag this dawn
are yet to grow across her cheek,
across her ivory mask of sleep.

正月

Second Moon

I drink last year's wine by the stream
where mint now greens and cherry
blossoms ready to burst their sheaths.

Yellow blossoms of willow await
hungry tongues of butterflies.
Mountains turn to jade.
All the growing plants resound.
The dog's bark sets the tree tops swaying.
Huge manes shake free from spring rain.

White silk clings to the hollow of her
hips, shadows her spin across the floor
of sky. The wind, a bamboo flute,
accompanies. The deep rumble of
a dragon-coiled thundercloud strums
the taut silk-spun string
of her body. Bright
streamers snap out around her.
A thousand arms surround her dance.

二
月

Evening comes early, still echoes
the stone cold chime of winter.
The green frog won't sing tonight.
Only the small comfort of this wine
is left. While in anxious sleep,
young women coax fox, badger,
weasel from their winter burrows.

Third Moon

East wind harps the pines.
 Yellow pollen frosts the crystal air,
 dusts the shoulders of farmers
 bent to open the ground.
 Swallows salvage mud
 to house their return.

The rising sun licks through
 the jostle of willow, a tongue
 of fire on the stream bank.
 New green waves on the graves
 of the dead, with the living,
 willing slaves to buds, shoots,
 roots that weave the earth.

My eyelids grow heavy
 with the petals of spring.
 White sheets of writing paper
 pray to be filled.

三
月

The wind scatters
 the thousand blossoms, rivers
 their scent to the west.
 It is this she trusts to take her
 sweet perfume, while
 for the evening alone,
 she shadows her eyes.

Fourth Moon

Leaves grow into their green,
what blossoms are left curl
to crescents in their shade.
Swallows chatter in the beams.

Peonies have found the will
to open, the high sun spins
their colors: water that sleeps
in moonlight, black robe stained
with wine. A stunted seed pod,
twisted loose by the breeze
drops into the blue pond.
The ripples don't last long.
The golden carp don't blink.

The warmth and dazzle of summer
depress me, no money to pilgrimage,
to return to memories, to leave
the city's walls. The rich caravan
to mountain shrines.

四
月

In the park, mothers, grandmothers,
doting girls play with their young.
In the cool shade of the trees,
who is that man shredding petals,
singing and beating time,
alone with his bottle of wine?

Fifth Moon

The river's current slices and twists
the cloud of moon into a host of lanterns.
Thermal winds sigh through pines.
Lament the drowned ones. The sun is down.
A resident pair of ducks fly the dark shore,
the flutter of wings cut into the night.

You held that rock like an amulet close
to your heart, like it was the last
piece of luck in the world.
You had tired of enticing her
with wild golden flights across
the sky, tired of your tricks
played out on high winds.
So you came back to earth
where you could name flowers
and took to throwing them
across the dark longing of her eyes.

Magnolias, orchids, melilotus,
petals strewn to hold her,
glistened like jewels of sweat
on her body, eddied and pooled
and ran down her dancing,
escaped from the swaying dark
tresses of her hair.
They soon lost their perfume,
not even time could bring them back.
You had thought at least
you could count on flowers.

Fifth Moon (continued)

What else could break through,
what was left, but the stone and you
the only one to build her a home
within the water. It was something
to hold, to weight you from the sky.
Unlike the delicate petals that
flew from your grasp, that stone
was firm to your embrace.

As you felt its cool press
against your breast, it was like her,
like the mornings you'd seen her shadow
twist and splay in the mist, the mornings
you took the dew as her caress.
As its weight pulled river into lake,
you felt your joy slowly sink
into the jade pool of her eyes.

The bubbles of your breath rose
like pearls through the dark clutch
of water. As you sank, wave after wave
came down to welcome you, Ch'ü Yüan,
and you held to the stone,
your final gift to her.

The nights will now grow longer.
I see her flower in the moonlight,
hear her laughter ripple the night,
daring me to fly.

五
月

Sixth Moon

The earth is sore with the red sun.
Willow branches sweep the yellow grass.
Leaves turn their silver charms
to face the dry wind. A turtle
stares from leather leaves
stretching across the lotus pond.

Caught in her dressing mirror,
the sun's mirror of flame finds her,
dissolves into lightning, turns
to black and green coils around her.
Thunder beats a continuous roll
across the drum of sky.

Shadows of freshly washed hair
spoke across her bowed shoulders,
a wheel of white petals jeweled
with the pleasures of rain.

六月

Seventh Moon

Starlight grows ripe
in the lengthening night, the cricket's
song whirrs in the rocks.
Bells clang, as cows come down
from summer grazing grounds.

Dripping from the stream's bath,
she rises to the wind's chill.
Clad only in the raiment of flesh,
she steps onto the bridge of wings,
the black, lonely shore of night.

There, she awaits his warmth,
smells the musk, feels the steam
of his body encircle her. The only
cloth she cannot weave herself.

Wrapped in this cloak,
her hands fall idle
in their days of languor.
The sky grows cold,
naked to her eyes.
Tears and rain
raise a silver river

between them.
Invisible processions of the dead
throng the night sky.
Candles float out on the river.
A field of flame.
Bonfire for what is past.

七月

Eighth Moon

Things have grown round.
They hunger to be held
by earth. Ripe
on the roadside, fat
black molecules of berries
suck from stems.
Apples, streaked red,
tug free from bent boughs,
thunk with the sound
of their juice. Melons
sink in the ground, holding
pools of sweetness inside
thick skins. Globes
of peaches, all turning
round and down. Perfectly
round, the autumn moon holds
herself high in the heavens.

Her arms of light move
across the scales of night,
comfort all things
with their measure.
Moon smooths the wrinkles
from my weary face,
turns to cool wine,
the air I breathe.
Her light lends grace
to the silhouette
of my awkward wanderings.

Eighth Moon (continued)

The many nights
these tired eyes
have held her.
The many times
this hand has
poised to write
I am coming home.

八
月

Ninth Moon

Slow with the tailings of summer,
the narrow stream whispers
like the rustle of raw silk.
Drying alder leaves chatter
in the breeze. The cricket's song
shadows me wherever I move.

In daylight, I climbed the heights,
left the rumble of the city,
the weight of moths and slow flies.
I rose above timberline,
over talus slopes, pulled up
through a rock chimney until
there was nothing left except
myself and the shrine of sky.

The wheel of the hawk rose
between us. The strong wind
made a song of the dry stalks
of bear grass. The kite of my body
filled with the world's breath.
Soon, there will be only snow.

Now, by the stream, the cold
dew crawls up my pantlegs.
Night takes the last croak
from the crow and the colors
from my eyes. From the cave
of underbrush, a night creature
cracks awake.

Ninth Moon (continued)

With wine, I try to sweep
clean the graves inside.
Drink sinks like sap into the dark,
leaves what is above ground
to the turning fall.

九月

Tenth Moon

Mountain peaks are buried
in the belly of cloud.
Fingers of fog trace
the furrow of each watershed.
The rendezvous that held
my hopes is frozen fast.
Wind has spun the colored leaves
to weave with the earth.
Frost burns the ribbon
of stream, kingfisher blue.

Stars spill
from the crystal cup
of moon. In the cold dark
before dawn, snowflakes drift
down the valley's clear sky.

Silence grips the shadows
like ice. Breath
clings white to my beard.

十
月

Eleventh Moon

Cold wind pierces the bare trellis of alder.
Frost laces the empty bench that
held the embrace of warmer nights.
Creatures slow in their fur coats.
Bears hole up in sleep.
Waterfalls hang in silence.
I dream of migrant geese.

It has been days since light
broke the thick cover of cloud.
Circling on their dim course,
the sun, the moon, seem erratic.
Darkness stretches ten thousand miles.
Chill cuts through my clothes,
stills my heart as I await
the thaw of dawn.

Only yesterday, I pleaded
for the night to hold the moonlight
closer to our touch. Now,
this longest night, she is far away,
beyond clouds, her bangles of white jade
slowly swinging, her echo
clinking through halls of ice.

十一月

Twelfth Moon

Before dawn, weak light breaks
red through windows
of houses clustered in
the hollow. Morning,
the many lives scatter

from the common bed of sleep.
Cold stars recede
through bare branches
of fruit trees, the fruits of summer
are gone, gone.
The moon remains.

The long nights end.
The long days begin.

十二月

Intercalary Month

We are certain of the time of coronation,
seldom death. Sunlight is accurately
recorded. The calendar is stuffed.

The blood let in its time, the smile
of the weasel, knows no end, only
accurate parts. These days are
numbered, the turning of blossom
to fruit, the circle of shadows
longing, the spin of repetition,
the remorseless accuracy of change.

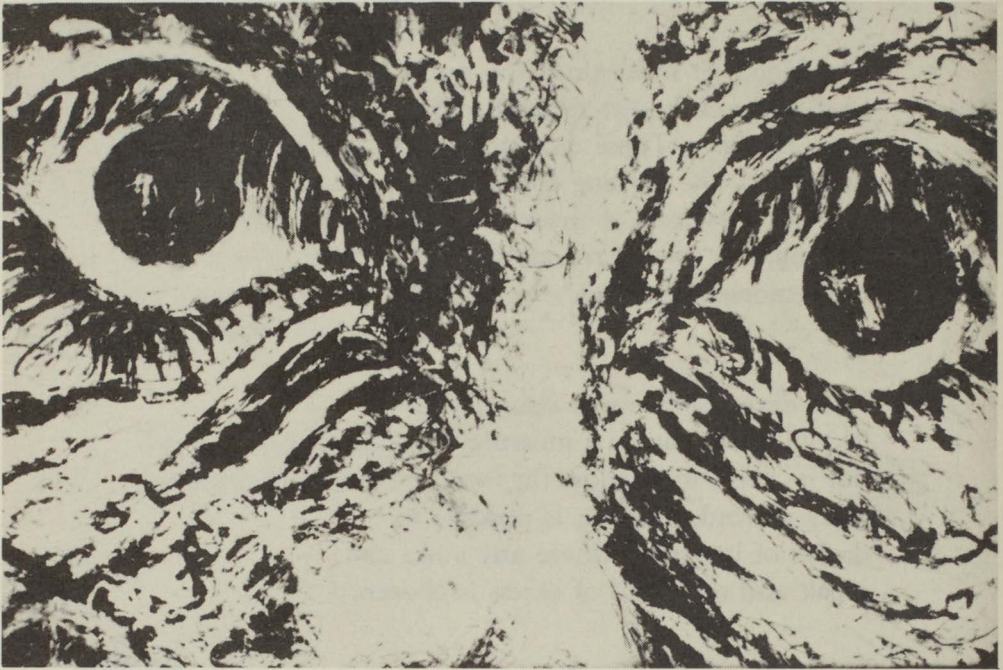
Now darkness turns in upon itself.
Moonlight is cut by a measure
not its own, its shadow thrown
away to void, where it is possible to
dream of laughing, where any voice can
speak and the hand of caress is chosen.

The picking of peaches, our labor, is
for the day and timely.

The drinking of that wine, our love, is
for night and seamless.

閏

月



Detail: Self Portrait I: cattlemarkers graphite on paper
by Chi-Ling Annie Chan

Chi-Ling Annie Chan was born in Hong Kong and received her B.F.A. from Leeds Polytechnic in Leeds, England. In 1984, she received an M.F.A. from the University of Montana. The Wing Luke Museum (Seattle), where her work will be on exhibition in November 1985, has selected her as one of its top three contemporary Asian-American artists.

Rivers of Wood

There are nights I lie awake and can't remember my life before I started at the mill. The farthest back I can go is the day Gary Wright caught a sliver in his eye and Chatten came to work in Gary's place. A sliver in the eye isn't such a bad thing. We didn't see why Gary had to lose his job over it. It wasn't like he cut anything off.

Missoula Lumber hires three winos for every hard worker, and Chatten we figured for a wino. He was over six feet tall and strong, but it was obvious he hadn't worked in a mill before. He didn't even have gloves. There was an extra pair in the washroom but nobody offered them to him.

The first morning he came over from the Job Service, I watched him pull four-quarter oak off the planer and pile it in a loose heap on a cart. In no time at all he had a terrible mess.

"Do you know what you're doing?" shouted the foreman, Duffy. Grant Duffy was a pretty fair football player once. He tried to go to college on football a couple of times but always had trouble keeping his weight down.

He made a big production out of turning off the planer and waiting for the knives to stop spinning. Duffy meant to tell the world how tough it was working with guys like Chatten. He had that look in his eye.

"Why didn't you tell me how you wanted it done in the first place?" asked Chatten. He was soft spoken, but his voice was so deep it sounded like it came all the way up from his shoes. I could see Duffy's neck swell. If the owner of the mill, a college type named Henries, hadn't come onto the floor just then, ranting and raving about a shipment of door stop that got sent half way to Moscow, Russia, instead of Moscow, Idaho, Chatten might have wished he'd kept his mouth buttoned.

We discovered we were going to miss Gary Wright. At noon, Chatten sat against the wall by his bicycle while he built his lunch. He ate strange food. He didn't eat lunchmeat, and I don't know if he even ate bread. He brought a bag of crackers made from rice and a jar of brown spread that looked like peanut butter, only wasn't. Then he made a kind of sandwich out of that, topping the whole mess off with sprouts and a trickle of honey. Half of it never got past his beard.

Gary Wright on the other hand had normal habits, and he'd always had

the best jokes to tell at lunch. He didn't go in for the real nasty ones. Mostly he told ethnic jokes but he wasn't prejudiced either. He would tell a joke about Mexicans, then one about blacks, then Indians. We had some Hmong boys working in the mill, and Gary was getting up a few Hmong jokes. He didn't have it out for any one group.

We tried to tell jokes like Gary did, but none of us were as good at it. Chatten's first day I told the one about putting velcro on the ceiling so little black kids won't jump on the bed. And Vernon Waddy told the one about what happens when a black marries a Puerto Rican, but he got it screwed up.

Then I started to tell the one about why there were only ten thousand Indians at Custer's last stand. I never got to the punch line.

"My wife's Indian," said Chatten.

I couldn't remember the rest. A couple of guys laughed like the joke was on me and Duffy came in glaring, told us all to get back to work. He glared twice at Chatten.

I didn't see Chatten again until five o'clock when I went to the lunchroom to get my thermos. He was standing next to his bike, an old-fashioned Schwinn with fat tires, and pulling splinters out of his hands with his teeth.

"Is this a joke, too?" he asked in that same voice he used on the foreman.

I could see from across the room that someone had let the air out of his tires. I figured if I didn't want an enemy for life I should offer him a ride home.

It had been snowing all day, so lucky for him, I thought, that somebody *had* let the air out of his tires. But you couldn't make him admit he was thankful for the ride. He hardly said a word all the time he was in my truck, even when we slid through an intersection and almost hit a station wagon.

We took the underpass to the other side of the Burlington Northern tracks where I suspected Chatten and his old lady lived in a mobile home. That's about the cheapest way to live. But then he said, "Right here," and had me pull up in front of a big white tipi. There was a painting of a blue buffalo on one side, or maybe an ox. He caught me staring at it.

"There aren't any blue buffalo," I said.

"You're right," said Chatten, and he stood there on the sidewalk until I drove away.

February was bitter. Night after night the pilot light went out on my furnace, and I woke up shivering. If I get too cold the muscles in the small of my back ache, sometimes for days.

One morning about five I couldn't get back to sleep even after I relit the furnace, so I got up and sat in a chair. While I was waiting for the paperboy to come, I could hear the woman downstairs arguing with her boyfriend about how often he wanted sex. It put me in a bad mood.

When I got to work, I found Duffy in the lunch room peeling an orange and

telling an Indian joke to the Hmongs. He can't tell jokes, but he's so big and awful that most of the guys wait around until the end to laugh.

"Talk about Indian jokes," I said, "you should see where this guy Chatten lives."

"Screw Chatten," said Duffy, like it was an order.

"No thank you," I said right back, and I could see Duffy didn't like that. "He lives in a damn tipi."

Nobody said anything. I thought maybe the Hmongs didn't know what a tipi was.

"You know, like the goddam wild Indians lived in," I said. I heard the can flush and Chatten came out of the men's room. He went over to study the different lists of rules pinned on the bulletin board and he didn't look at me.

"What kind of Indians?" asked Duffy. He stuck half his orange in his mouth and grinned at me.

"Never mind," I said.

"You help Chatten on the planer," said Duffy. He spit a half dozen seeds onto the floor, still grinning. "You guys will make a great team."

We ran the planer together for two weeks. Both of us were determined that we weren't going to screw up, but that was no reason to talk to each other. I fed the boards in at one end and Chatten caught them at the other. That first morning, when we stopped for a minute so Duffy could bring up a new bunk of rough lumber, I showed Chatten a couple of tricks I'd seen guys use to stack the boards easier. After that he didn't have any trouble.

We planed oak, ash, cherry, maple, birch. Working on the planer is like holding rocks under running water and watching what happens. Beautiful patterns come out, like the plowed fields you see from an airplane. Like rivers of wood, the way a creek will wind around and double back on itself in flat country. One afternoon we surfaced a small bunk of cedar and for a day the mill smelled like a hope chest. It made me remember one of my sisters had a hope chest once. I don't know what she put in it, except towels. She had a lot of bath towels in there.

Planing was hard work, but Chatten and I learned to get along. Sometimes an oversize board would jam up on me and Chatten would come around and help push until the knives could clean up a big knot. I didn't have to ask him.

If my back was bothering me, we would switch for a while so I could tail. I noticed from time to time Chatten's hands would be bleeding, but he didn't complain. He just wouldn't give in to wearing gloves.

It was only normal that somebody eventually took exception to Chatten's lunch. The most unusual thing any of the guys was likely to bring to eat was

a slice of banana bread his old lady had baked for the kids. And he'd eat that on the sly.

Across the street from the mill lived a crippled lady with her dachshund, Pete, who made a habit of doing his morning chores just outside the mill door. One morning while we were planing eight-quarter walnut, somebody went out in the snow and gathered four frozen dog turds about the size of Vienna sausages and used those rice crackers to make Chatten a sandwich. When twelve o'clock came, Chatten took one look in his lunch and just left the room, not giving anybody the satisfaction of seeing him pissed off. Everybody laughed too hard, and I knew Duffy was behind it.

I ate most of my lunch, then went out to where Chatten was sitting on the bunk of cherry that we were going to plane next.

"You want a sandwich?" I asked. "It's baloney, but it's good baloney. It's real mayonnaise."

"No thanks," he said. He was wearing an old jacket that said "49ers" on the back in faded blue letters. He turned the pockets inside out and we watched two handfuls of sawdust fall to the floor.

"Any reason," he asked, "why we can't get back to work a little early?"

It had never been done but I couldn't think of the reason why. When we fired up the planer, Duffy came out to stare at us, then stare up at the clock, then back at us, but he couldn't think of any company rules we were breaking, either. Except for the unwritten rule that says do as little as possible when the boss isn't around.

But going back to work a half hour early wasn't too good an idea. The others tried to ignore us, they just couldn't ignore the planer for long. It sounds like a 747 revving up for take off inside your hall closet. It's nothing you want to eat lunch to.

Duffy turned the lights off on us. But it doesn't get that dark in the middle of the afternoon, even if the mill is as cold and damp as a cave in winter. I glanced toward the lunchroom to see who was playing with the lights and saw two guys pull their pants down and stick their butts through the lunchroom door. I hadn't seen anyone do that in a while and it made me laugh.

Duffy dug up an orange frisbee and threw it clean across the mill at us, bouncing it off the rip saw and one of the molders. Some other wise guys thought they'd use the dog turds from Chatten's lunch for baseballs. At least they were still frozen, pretty much. Everybody got in on the act. The Hmongs, who were practicing driving the forklift in little circles, started honking the horn at us, shave-and-a-haircut.

Times like that, somebody's always got to carry things too far, like Duffy deciding the frisbee wasn't enough. He came tearing out of the lunchroom on Chatten's bicycle, trying to ride without any hands and juggle the frisbee and two cans of coke. When he started to lose his balance, in a desperate act he flung the frisbee at us again, this time sending it straight into the knives of the

planer. Little bits of orange plastic came spitting out the other side and I had to turn it off. Chatten was staring at Duffy with a look that said 'I don't believe this for a minute.'

"It's just a frisbee," I told him. Then I saw what Chatten was upset about. The foreman had crashed into a pile of scrap lumber with Chatten's bike, and the Hmong boy driving the forklift had speared the rear wheel before he could remember how to raise the fork or even how to step on the brakes. He'd torn the chain completely off the hub and broke six or eight spokes as well.

Even then, things could probably have been smoothed over if Duffy had said he was sorry and offered to pay for a new wheel. Instead he took a swing at the kid on the forklift, and he yelled at Chatten.

"I guess you'll wait for everyone to go back to work from now on, chief," said Duffy. "You'll quit trying to be so goddam different." He walked back to the lunchroom, trying not to limp.

Chatten picked up the pieces of his bicycle. He was holding himself in so hard his eyes were going bloodshot.

"We'll see about being different," he said.

I gave him a ride home again. This time he wouldn't even speak to give me directions to his house, although that's no big thing. I've lived in Missoula all my life. I know my way around.

"Come on in," he said when I pulled up in front of the tipi.

"Well," I said and I was stalling, trying to think of a way to stay in the truck, "what do you do in there? I mean, can you sit down?"

I was tired and I didn't really want to stand stooped over in any damn tipi just to watch Chatten's old lady grind little seeds into peanut butter.

"Come on," said Chatten. He walked up to a little brick house in the next lot and waited on the porch for me.

"This is your house?" I asked.

"We're just renting," said Chatten. He unlaced his boots and left them on the back porch, had me do the same.

They lived in a normal house. They had a kitchen table and a tv and refrigerator and everything. His wife was sitting at the table with some books spread out in front of her.

"How'd it go today?" she asked, and the way she asked I knew Chatten had told her all about the mill and the bastards he had to work with.

"Better," he said and he kissed her. She was a pretty girl, though not really so young. I thought she might be pregnant. She moved careful, the way pregnant women do.

"Want a cup of coffee?" asked Chatten.

"I can't stay," I told him, but I took the cup he had already poured. I felt like I wasn't supposed to be there. They had a nice home for a rental. The

floors were polished — quarter-sawn oak like you can't buy anymore — and I could see a big oriental rug in the living room with a unicorn on it. A pot simmered on the stove. The whole kitchen smelled sweet and warm like onions. The coffee was good, too, the blackest coffee I ever drank, but not bitter.

"I better run," I said, trying to finish what was in my cup.

"You married?" asked Chatten's wife. "You could stay for dinner." I could tell she meant it, and Chatten looked like he was starting to relax now that he was out of the mill.

I wasn't sure he would understand why I didn't stay. I wasn't sure I knew why myself. I liked their house a lot. It reminded me of my grandmother's place in Polson and I liked my grandmother, too. I guess I felt myself starting to like them, and I wasn't ready to do that.

"Who owns the tipi?" I asked.

"I'm not sure," said Chatten. "A bunch of leftover hippies hang around over there in the summer." That's what he called them. Leftovers.

"Isn't it awful?" said his wife.

"I kind of like it," said Chatten, the hard look coming back to his face. I gave him his empty coffee cup.

"Tomorrow," he said, instead of saying good-bye.

I went home. I found the woman downstairs crying in her living room, her front door open. She had her bathrobe on and she didn't care if I stared in or not. Her boyfriend was leaving with a suitcase that wouldn't close right and a big ivy plant in a fancy pot.

"You keep the rest," he said, but she didn't answer.

Upstairs the furnace had gone out again, and the place smelled like gas. I propped the window open and waited for enough of the smell to go away so I could relight the pilot. It seemed like my apartment was quieter than usual. Nobody sat at my kitchen table with books spread out in front of her. There wasn't any pot of onions boiling on my stove, and no coffee made either. There was only someone slamming the front door downstairs.

I got out my baseball bat and worked over the furnace a little bit. I felt better after that.

The next morning when Chatten's wife dropped him off for work, I waved to her and she called me over to the car.

"Don't let him be stupid," she said. She lit a cigarette and took a hit off it, watching Chatten's back go through the mill door. It surprised me to see her smoke, a pregnant lady.

"Don't worry," I told her. She took another drag on her cigarette and threw it into the snow.

I went into the lunchroom where the boys were gathered around the coffee pot. They were watching Chatten out of the corner of their eye, and I couldn't tell if they were still laughing at him or if they were starting to get embarrassed about riding him so hard. I figured things would start to get easier for him.

Chatten took off his coat and hung it on one of the many nails pounded into the wall of our lunchroom for our convenience. Then he took off his cap and hung it up, too, and I heard someone grunt.

Chatten had shaved his head.

He hadn't shaved the whole thing which wouldn't have been so bad. He shaved the sides but he left the middle long like that black giant on television. Only of course, Chatten wasn't any black giant. He looked like the last Mohican Indian and he looked a little bit like the drummer in some punk rock band.

"What do you think?" he asked.

"I think you better keep your cap on," I told him.

"I could do that for awhile." Chatten took his cap, a blue wool thing, down off the wall. "I want Duffy to get the full effect."

"Oh, Duffy," said one of the Hmong boys, nodding his head.

Duffy gave us three bunks of barn wood and put us on the planer again. He knew my back was killing me after all that time on the planer, but he was too big a prick to let me switch to a molder or tally lumber for a bit.

Used wood is a pain in the butt, too. The boards get warped and twisted from all those years on the side of some old barn. But to look at Chatten you'd have thought somebody just gave him a raise.

"I'll feed," said Chatten. It was all the same to me. I stuck plugs in my ears, then pulled a headset on over them. That way when Chatten started up the planer it only sounded like one jet and not a whole squadron of jets.

Chatten looked his boards over carefully, butting them up against each other as he fed them into the knives. He had learned quick enough. The boards he planed were just as free of snipe as anybody's. He fed a dozen through without any hangups, and I stopped paying attention.

I thought about the woman in the apartment below me. I'd never talked to her much. The night before, I was just getting into the spirit of things, giving the furnace a few good licks, when I looked up and saw her in the doorway. She was wearing that bathrobe, and even with her hair a mess and her eyes kind of runny, she surprised me how good she looked standing there.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

I guess I'd been making a lot of noise. The cover of the furnace was completely caved in and I'd broke the little door to the pilot light off its hinges. The thermostat dial was rolling around on the floor.

"Fixing the furnace," I told her.

"Mine could use some work," she said, and we both broke up. It felt good to laugh, until I saw she wasn't exactly laughing. She was crying, and not just sniffing either, but really crying from her heart, standing there with her

arms at her side, her palms turned half towards me like there was something she wanted.

This is what I could have done. I could have set down my baseball bat and put my arms around her, pulled her head against my shoulder and let her cry all she wanted. I might have stroked her hair and untangled some of the mats with my fingers, and sort of rocked her there until she stopped. Then I could have kissed her all over her face, and if she liked that, I could have pulled her into the room and shut the door behind us, turned out the light so she would have been more comfortable. I could have slipped that robe off her shoulders and told her I was sorry for smelling like a lumber mill. It was my job and all.

I didn't do any of that. I stood there watching her bawl. It must have seemed like a long time to her. Finally she ran down the stairs and the door slammed again. I got my down bag out of the closet and went to bed.

Chatten fed the planer and the wood came out my side, cleaned up rivers of wood, the grain wandering here and there but not getting anywhere, ever. He picked up another board and looked at it closely. I saw the nail in the middle of the board, just like I know Chatten must have seen it, and I saw the smile on his face as he eased the wood into the planer.

If a planer sounds like a jet, then a planer ruining its knives on a sixteen penny nail sounds like a jet coming apart at the seams. I ran around the board coming through my side and tried to shut the machine off. Chatten was supposedly doing the same thing, but somehow his hands got in the way of mine and neither one of us managed to shut the planer down before the nail did its damage. Then Chatten pushed the reverse button and backed the board, nail and all, into the knives again. I heard the same horrible noise, had the same awful crashing feeling. Chatten shifted the planer into high, grinding the gears like a fifteen-year-old girl in her first driver's training class. That was too much. One of the knives broke and small steel scraps flew like buckshot across the mill floor. I finally outmaneuvered Chatten and hit the kill switch.

With the planer down, the mill was quiet. I looked around to see if anybody got hurt, but all I saw was Duffy jumping off the forklift, running towards us, his face already twisted into a mean look.

"Goddam, goddam!" he yelled. And then the door opened to the lunchroom and out came the boss himself, Mr. Andrew T. Henries, all five feet five inches of him, walking in that peculiar way he has like he's constipated, like something is stuck down there where it counts.

That's when Chatten took off his hat.

He stopped Duffy cold in his tracks. Henries walked sideways up to the planer and asked through his nose, "What happened here?" but all the time he kept his eyes on Chatten's Mohican. Like the blame was there in that patch of hair. Chatten stepped back from the planer and scratched his scalp like he was

puzzled by the whole thing, too. Me, I picked up a crescent wrench.

"Only a fool could let this happen," said Henries to the foreman, though he obviously wasn't sure exactly what had happened. "A fool or worse," he said, looking across at Chatten who was grinning a crazy grin and leaning on an oak four by four, a board about the length of a baseball bat but twice as thick.

And Chatten was grinning right into Duffy's face when Duffy said, "Squaw man."

Chatten started to swing that four by four but I was quicker than he was. I beat him to the punch. I caught Duffy across the forehead with the crescent wrench. I hit him hard. I knew I'd have to if I didn't want him getting up. The foreman sat right down, but he stayed down, a pretty magnificent cut opening up over one eye, and Henries started screaming at me, grabbing hold of my arm.

Try as I would, I couldn't shake him loose. Chatten looked confused. He'd wanted to hit Duffy but Duffy was cold on the floor. People came running from all over the mill. The Hmongs were shouting something nobody could understand and Vernon Waddy, for some reason, grabbed the night-watchman's flashlight and shined it into my eyes. Henries stomped on my foot and got the wrench away from me, then this guy Turner, thinking he had to be cute, tried to wrestle me to the ground. Chatten popped him with the four by four, which had everyone ganging up on us. The last thing I saw before they got the best of me was Chatten taking a good swing at Henries and Henries backing through the lunchroom door.

They called it a riot, but Duffy was the only one who got hurt bad. He already had three concussions from football, and they say those things get worse the more you have. He was in St. Pats for a week.

In spite of all I did, Chatten still ended up in trouble. Seems he was on probation for beating hell out of some guy up on the reservation. Who would have imagined that? Maybe someone didn't like seeing him with an Indian woman and they fought. He never told me about it.

There's always been an honorable way to settle differences in the west, according to Judge Kirby, but hitting a man with a wrench is dishonorable. He said he'd reduce my sentence if I'd only tell him why I did it. I didn't tell him anything.

But if I'd been able to say it in so many words, I'd have told him about Chatten's wife, how she was pregnant and how she studied her books at their kitchen table. I would have tried to tell him how onions smelled in a warm kitchen and how that smell is nice to walk in to from the snow. And if that judge looked like he understood, I might have even told him about the unicorn on their living room rug, how that reminded me of my grandmother in Polson who was a sweet and graceful lady, and how it was the exact same one as in

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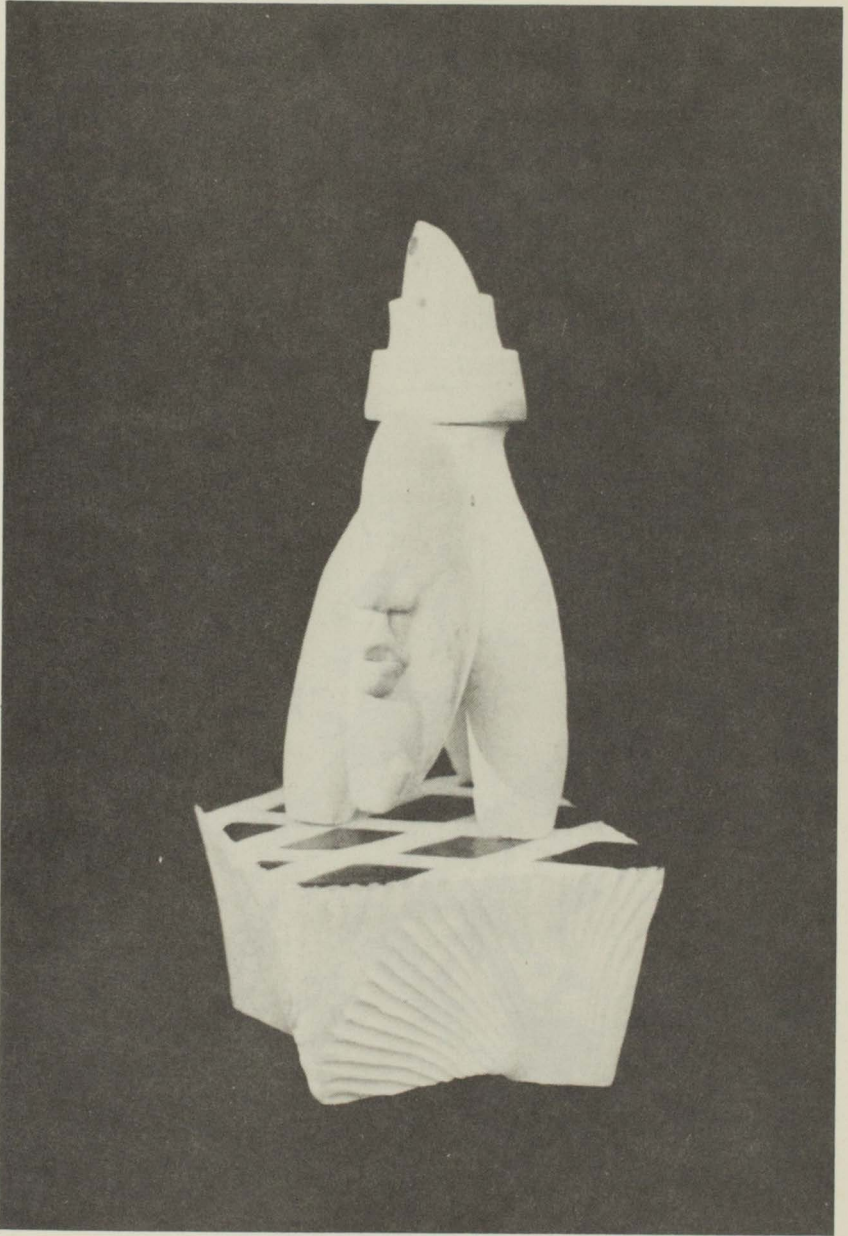
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a picture book she had of unicorns and mermaids and men who were goats from the waist down.



Subjective 2: pen & ink on paper by Margo Burwell

Margo Burwell owns and operates a graphics business in Tucson, Arizona where she also makes her home.



The Black Rose: clay sculpture by Fox Joy McGrew

Fox Joy McGrew makes her home and has a studio in Oracle, Arizona's Rancho Linda Vista. Her clay sculptures are exhibited nationally and her work is on permanent display at the Tucson Museum of Art.

The Burning of Uncle

The banked gravel road sticks out from the flat land like a scratch on a hand.

Three men are trotting towards the road from across the field. They bob up and down and slowly make their way to the road. Like field mice finding refuge in a sage bush, they go to a small opening into the brush and cotton wood trees that line the road.

"Ho, ho, ho, pretty damn cold," says the larger man. The collar of his long wool coat has four holes cut on each side and the sides are tied together by a leather boot lace like the shank of a high top tennis shoe. He wipes the small streams of sweat from his forehead and it glistens. A scar from the side of his lip runs to his nose and causes a break in his mustache. He comes to a stop and waits for the other two men. His name is Skiddo.

"Hey? Hey? How come-come-how-come-we-have to run? You'll freeze out our lungs, Skiddo." This man's name is Bull Cookies. He walks around for a moment and comes to a stop and rubs his hump of a belly. A bath towel serves as a cap and earmuffs. He takes off the towel and wipes off the sweat. Then he re-wraps the towel around his head and smiling he looks up into Skiddo's eyes.

"Skiddo. Cah-zin. Why do you want to run for? We're not going to be late for anything." This man's name is Skin. He stays a few feet from the other two men. He bends over and rubs his knees. A tail from his hand made gopher skin cap snaps down and slaps his eyeglasses. He takes off his glasses and allows the fog to clear from them.

Bull Cookies pats his arms across his own chest and says, "Give him a drink, Skin. He'll warm up-boy."

Skin takes out a fifth from underneath his shirt. There are no numbers, letters, or pictures, on the bottle. He gives it to Skiddo who unscrews the bottle's cap and drinks. The sucking of the liquid causes his cheeks to pinch. The cap bounces on the crusty snow. "But just one little one-hey," says Skin.

"God this one. Getting greedy." Bull Cookies shakes his head. "Is that what they taught you in whiteman's school?"

"No Uncle. They didn't teach me anything," Skin backs away from Bull Cookies and Skiddo. "But I know when I'm cold-hey."

"Never should have sent you off to school. Never should have let you go. Even when that BIA guy threaten to have me thrown in jail." Bull Cookies

turns away from Skin. He takes a long draw from the bottle. The bottle's dark green color is shared by the fluid inside, but when a sloppy drink is taken and a drop escapes the grasp of lips the drink is clear like water.

"You know." Bull Cookies walks over to Skin and throws his arm around Skin's shoulder. "I raised this guy here." He kisses Skin. "Right after his father died. His father-my brother."

"He knows you raised me Uncle." Skin is passed the bottle and takes a drink. He looks at Skiddo and takes another drink.

"Good whiskey." Skiddo is bouncing up and down on the balls of his feet. "Better-n' that shit we had before."

"What do you know about good drinking juices? I bet you haven't even tasted your first woman yet-huh." Bull Cookies releases Skin and laughs at Skiddo. "Give me another shot-nephew." Bull Cookies tilts the bottle back and causes the alcohol inside the bottle to gurgle.

"Holy-ee, Uncle. Not that thirsty. I hope." Skin takes the bottle and drinks. He then looks at Skiddo and passes it to Skiddo. "Here you go Cah-zin."

The sound of the cars on Highway #2 a quarter mile east of them are mingling with the sounds of Skin using a branch to tap on a cottonwood stump. A field mouse watches the three men from a rotted metal bucket. A school bus passes by on the road above them. The bus driver slows the bus down and looks at them. He shakes his head and speeds away and cusses at the three men; the one singing, the one drumming, and the other who is dancing. The bus crawls on the highway that connects Dodson and Oswego, Montana. A farm house a mile south of them comes to life with lights. A cloud hangs over the chimney stack. An owl looks down on the men from atop a cottonwood. The owl raises its wings and hops into the air and slowly glides farther down the road. The three men stand a few feet from each other and become the points of a triangle. They pass the bottle. When the bottle is nearly empty the triangle is broken up. Bull Cookies finds a small stump and sits.

"Hey-don't do that." Skiddo is talking to himself and rocks backward on his heels and doesn't look at anyone. He leans forward into the cold. "Cookie. Bull Cookie. Bull-fuck-Cookies. God damn Bull fuck Cookies."

"What?" Bull Cookies swirls on the stump.

"I'm cold." Skiddo smiles.

"Hey-yeah." Skin agrees and tries to run in place. His ankles get snared by roots and branches of the brush.

"Drink more whiskey, got-damn it. Or-or go home. I think that's what I'm trying to do." Bull Cookies bounces on the stump. "Go home and hide that

bottle. They aren't going to catch me, got-damn it."

"Let's go home then." And Skin tightens his grip on the bottle's neck and takes a few steps forward.

"You gonna climb that bank, Skin?" Skiddo looks at Skin and points to the steep gravel bank.

"I thought that guy was bad," Bull Cookies points to Skiddo, "But this guy is worse." Bull Cookies tries to focus on Skiddo. "Go my son-go and get an education-go my son-go and climb a ladder."

"Stop-stop singing that goddamn Mormon song. You goddamn Mormon." Skiddo takes a step towards Bull Cookies. Bull Cookies pinches his nose and blows snot out that leaves a trail on his face. He looks at Skiddo and smiles big.

"Hey-hey-look at my rabbit nose-oh-I mean scar," says Bull Cookies. He uses his hand to wipe off the snot and cleans the hand in the two week old snow and dries the hand on a pants leg.

"Goddamn old man. That's disgust-that disgust-its sick-hey." Skiddo charges forward and comes to a sharp halt in front of Bull Cookies. He nearly knocks Bull Cookies over the stump.

"Hey watch it." Bull Cookies leans his head below Skiddo's belly button and clutches Skiddo's hips on the side. Bull Cookies digs his feet into the snow as he tries to steady himself and Skiddo.

"I'm sorry. I'm sorry, Uncle." Skiddo leans over Bull Cookies shoulders. He begins to cry. "Please don't be mad at me, Uncle. I'm sorry. You've always treated me good."

"All right, Skiddo. Now let go of me got-damn it." Bull Cookies pushes Skiddo, but can't get him off. "All of a sudden I'm everyone's got-damn Uncle."

"Poor Uncle." Skiddo cries harder and claws deeper into Bull Cookies. "He lost his wife."

"Where? Where did you lose her?" Now Skin begins to cry. "I'll go and find her for you, Uncle."

"Stop your crying. Both of you. She's dead. I don't want to talk about it," says Bull Cookies.

Skiddo releases Bull Cookies and steps back. Bull Cookies groans and falls over and passes out.

"He's dead!" Skiddo jumps up and throws both of his arms into the air.

"No! Really?" Skin walks over to Bull Cookies' body. He reaches out with his foot and taps Bull Cookies in the ribs. Bull Cookies moans. "See. He's not dead."

"Oh. I thought he was. Give me a drink," says Skiddo and takes a drink.

"God. I'm cold." Skin runs in place and falls over.

"Hey. Cuzin. Let's build a fire." Skiddo puts the bottle into his coat and goes over to Skin. Skin is trying to get to his feet and reaches out to Bull Cookies and uses Bull Cookies' body to get up. "Huh-you want to build a fire?"

"No," says Skin.

"Skiddo picks up Skin. "Come on. Let's build one."

"No." Skin nearly falls down again.

"Yeah. If we don't, Uncle will freeze. We can use some of these dead branches and I got that paper sack from the bottle," says Skiddo.

"Pull off the dead branches." A small stream of saliva comes to its end on Skin's chin.

Skin and Skiddo gather branches, a few broken fence posts, paper bags, and young dead trees. A cock pheasant watches the passing men and is ready for flight. Skin comes too close to the cock and it takes flight from its cover in the brush. Skin runs back to Skiddo. The field mouse dashes from out of the bucket, and from the sky a dark shadow swoops down and scoops up the field mouse. They build a small pile near Bull Cookies. The lights of the farm house are brighter, Highway #2 is silent, the pile has grown, and Bull Cookies has disappeared.

"There we go, Skin. Get ready-hey. This is going to be a big fire. It'll singe your hairs and you'll really be an Indian like me." Skiddo takes out a book of matches from his shirt pocket. He gets closer to some paper and and small twigs, and he strikes the match. The sulphur makes him cough and the flame from the match dies out.

"Hurry up Skiddo-hey, hurry. I'm freezing."

Skiddo's second try is successful. The flame brings life to the paper, to the twigs, and to a piece of cloth.

"Hey." Skin moves closer to the fire.

"What?" Skiddo slowly straightens his body and shrugs to bring life into his back muscles.

"Where's Uncle?"

"He must've gone home. You know how old people are. Why are you worried about it?"

"I didn't see him leave."

"Shit Skin. He probably got mad and left."

"Yeah."

"I bet he's home right now and passed out by the stove."

"Uh-huh."

"At least we'll be warm and we have the bottle." Skiddo takes the bottle out from his pocket and takes a drink. He gives the bottle to Skin.

"Yeah, but I didn't see him leave is all."

Surface Damage

The seeds clung to the inside of the spoon. She had to shake them off.

He sat down at the table.

She ran her fingers around and around the top of the glass.

"Stop that." He salted the melon.

She picked up what had spilled and threw it over her shoulder.

"Now you just have to pick it up off the floor," he said.

She looked out the window. The woman next door was hanging laundry. The wind caught it, spinning it like a carousel.

*

She dragged the broom, catching the light before it hit the hardwood.

"You're just spreading it around." He walked to the truck. "That's the thing . . . it just moves on to something else."

He looked at her through the tiny crosses of the screen, "It'll come back. It always does."

*

She beat rugs until the light was turgid.

The woman came over. "Dirt is blowing on my laundry."

Her children ran around in circles, faster and faster just to fall down laughing.

"Thought you was a dust devil." She smiled. "We used to have them bad around here. But your're too young to remember. Took off all the top soil. Couldn't plant nothing." She walked off, one foot in front of the other.

*

Back inside, she realized she was hungry. She went to the refrigerator and drew out her untouched melon. The top layer was all dried out but underneath it was still soft and sweet.

*

He came home from work at lunch time.

She looked up, surprised.

"Afraid you'd left me."

She shook her head, waxing stubbornly, around and around until the wood shone like obsidian.

Saint Ferdinand Strikes Back

The Church of Our Lady Sin Peccado was built on top of a mosque. Carved over the entrance is an expression in Arabic: "Life is much shorter than death." The church is five blocks and one plaza from the great Cathedral of Seville, one of the largest in Europe and the final resting place of Saint Ferdinand and Christopher Columbus. The Church of Our Lady has, in addition to a bell tower, a clock which the local people say is correct at least twice a day.

The bell hangs outside the tower and is rung by a life-size cast iron statue of Saint Ferdinand, patron and savior of Seville. When the hour occurs, a wooden door in the tower opens and Ferdinand, pulled along a track by a chain, follows a short catwalk to the bell, which he strikes with the crozier in his right hand.

The clock was maintained by Juan Rozas. Juan was sixty-eight years old and, were it not for the clock tower, would have had no place to sleep.

Juan's tiny monthly pension lasted hardly three weeks. After tobacco, wine, and the bullfights, there was very little money for food. In exchange for a steeple over his head Juan kept the clock running. Near the end of the month, Juan lived on oranges which grew freely on many trees in the neighborhood. At the cafe across the street on the Pedro Corral, Juan could count on someone standing him to a glass of calvados and some barnacle tapas. And he had a place to sleep.

It was not so important that the clock always be exactly correct, only that it keep moving, so that on the hour Saint Ferdinand, the guardian angel of Seville, would come out of the bell tower and strike the hours. When the hours were struck, everyone in the neighborhood knew that things were as usual, which was the way they liked them.

Keeping the clock running was not difficult. The mechanism consisted of weights and counterweights. Once a day, when the weights descended almost to the floor, Juan pulled down the counterweights and the system was recharged.

Juan's problem had begun five months before, on the twelfth of January, the day his brother Carlos died. On this day Saint Ferdinand refused to budge from the tower. Juan tried to push open the wooden door. Finally, using an iron bar that stood in a corner, he pried the door open. Still Saint Ferdinand wouldn't move. Juan went out on the catwalk with his steel bar and struck

the bell. As the next hour approached, Juan pried at Saint Ferdinand but he refused to move. There seemed to be nothing else to do, so Juan went out the door and again struck the bell.

Juan studied the pendulum and weights. He noticed how they were connected to gears with trip levers, and these gears turned other wheels which in turn turned other gears. Somehow related to all this were pulleys and chains which reacted to the gears and every so often turned some gears of their own. On and on the wheels and gears rose toward the ceiling of the clock tower. There was no good reason why Saint Ferdinand had ever worked. Carlos, the best blacksmith in Andalusia, had forged most of these parts by hand thirty years before, when the clock had been overhauled. Because of Carlos' excellent work, Juan was chosen to be the keeper of the clock of Saint Ferdinand. And now his benefaction, his free room, was in jeopardy. Juan had never really considered any of this before. Only that the weights descended and the counterweights ascended. Carlos had taken care of everything else.

If Juan reported this malfunction, the authorities would send a clock repairman, who in turn might recommend a real maintenance man. While he thought, Juan went out every hour and struck the bell. At the end of the first day of Saint Ferdinand's retirement, Juan decided the clock was too fast. So he added more weights to the counterweights, and the whole system slowed down. The next day had only eight hours. Juan sat in the cafe across the street and watched the clock as he sipped his complementary calvados and ate his barnacles.

After buying Juan a drink, a neighbor would inquire, "Ah, my friend, and how is it with our patron saint?"

Raising his glass toward the open door through which Saint Ferdinand could still be seen in the tower, Juan said, "What the centuries have done cannot be undone overnight."

When the hands on the clock drew near the hour Juan would rise, saying, "I must go and see if Saint Ferdinand is any better." He would cross the street, enter the church, climb to the clock tower, strike the bell, and return to the cafe.

After five months of striking the bell eight times a day, Juan was ready marry Carlos' widow, Maria Garza. It was the duty of the next of kin to assume family responsibility, and Maria in her lovely home could use some looking after. The poor woman was losing her eyesight. She had picked and fed Carlos a pound of toadstools, thinking them morels. Juan sent a message to Maria, asking permission to call on her the following Sunday for the purpose of taking over his rightful family obligations—once the mourning period had ended, of course.

Juan hated to travel. The farthest he had been was Cadiz, a seaport 150 kilometers from Seville. But now he realized he hated having to be in the same spot eight times a day, ringing the bell every three hours. What could one do in three hours? Certainly one could not go to the bullring and see more than

one corrida. One could not sit and enjoy a glass of wine with friends without having to jump up every three hours and strike the bell. One might as well be a statue in the tower like old Ferdinand.

By return messenger came a basket with cheeses, bread, two bottles of Montilla, and a note from Maria saying she would be honored to receive Juan on Sunday.

Juan cut off chunks of bread and cheese and washed it down with the wine. It was nearly midnight. He slumped down onto his bedroll and looked around the tower as though for the last time. Everywhere he looked were empty bottles and orange peels. Ah, he thought, how can a person live in a place like this? He was exhausted from bell ringing. The day's calvados, followed by the two bottles of wine, made his tiredness just bearable. If it weren't for tomorrow and more calvados and Maria's fine house, and fine wines, and delicious chesses. . . . If there were any clocks in Maria's house, he was not tending them.

His glance fell on Saint Ferdinand. "And, you, my lazy friend. What will you do when your loyal slave, Juan, is gone? You will go back to work. You will work or they will come and make you work. Everyone is not so softhearted as Juan. You will move or they will take that iron bar and they will stick it right up. . . ." Juan began to laugh. "Yes, my friend, then you will move."

It was after twelve. Juan got the iron bar out of the corner and climbed up onto the landing. As he passed Saint Ferdinand, he gave him a rap on the head and told him to enjoy his siesta.

Juan went out the door and gave the bell a tremendous blow. His fingers stung. The bar seemed to be vibrating in his hands. The bell had never sounded better. Even Juan's feet were tingling. Beneath his feet something was moving. He looked down and the chain drive was advancing. He turned and Saint Ferdinand was coming out of the doorway. The crozier in his right hand was drawn back in the striking position.

Saint Ferdinand came right at Juan. There was nowhere to go. Saint Ferdinand stopped as the bottom of the cast iron statue dragged itself up onto Juan's sandaled feet, crushing most of his toes. Juan screamed in agony and dropped his iron bar. The crozier came down, just missing Juan's head. In panic, Juan dived over the low railing and hung upside down, suspended from the tower only by his mangled feet.

Saint Ferdinand struck the bell eleven more times. Then the statue reversed itself and went back into the clock tower, as Juan fell sixty feet to the cobblestones below.



photo by: William Pitt Root

Detail: Attic: lithograph by James G. Davis

William Kittredge
We Are Not In This Together
Graywolf Press
Port Townsend, Washington
1984
\$6.00

The assertion has been ventured before and I venture it again here—that William Kittredge is, to put it minimally, one of the leading short story writers in this country today. In my opinion *We Are Not In This Together*, his new book of eight stories published by Greywolf Press, pretty much settles the matter for the foreseeable future. His is the voice of today's northwest as clearly as, in their day, F. Scott Fitzgerald's was of the northeast or William Faulkner's of the south. And yet, like the work of these two masters, Mr. Kittredge's stories far exceed their regional boundaries, press beyond them through his skill and passion into the circle of the universal.

The stories in this collection are so very immediate and real that reading one is like entering an actual life, *in medias res*, meeting his characters in the flesh, right up close, very close. The sound of their talk, their looks, clothes, condition in life—always tragic or on tragedy's verge—their very names and the names of their towns (as Raymond Carver notes in his praiseful and graceful *Foreword*) all together make a perfect oneness. And the texture of the prose is perfectly suited for such evocations of the real. Take this cross sectional swatch from the very beginning of this collection's opening story, *The Waterfowl Tree*, in which a father and son go hunting together with tragic results for both:

They ran into snow almost two hours before reaching the valley, the storm at twilight whipping in gusts across the narrow asphalt. The station wagon moved slowly through the oncoming darkness.

"A long haul," his father said. "Eva will be wondering."

The boy, tall and seventeen, his hands behind his neck, watched out the glazed and crusted side windows at the indeterminate light. This mention of the woman could be a signal, some special beginning.

"Is she pretty?" he asked.

"Pretty enough for me. And that's pretty enough."

The man laughed and kept his eyes on the road. He was massive, a widower in his late fifties. "I've got too old for worrying about pretty," he said. "All I want is gentle. When that's all you want, you got to be getting old."

In a little while the man said, "I remember hunting when I was a kid. It was different then, more birds for one thing, and you had to kill something with every shot."

"How do you mean?" the boy asked.

"We were meat hunters. You spent money for shells, you brought home meat. I saw Teddy Spandau die on that account. Went off into open water chest deep, just trying to get some birds he shot. Cramped up and drowned. We hauled a boat down and fished him out that afternoon."

The snow began to thin and the man pushed the car faster and concentrated on his driving.

"It was like this then," he said. "Snowing and ice a foot thick and below zero all day."

There are several observations to be made about this opening passage in the book and I'll use it as my single text here for reasons of space. The passage not only puts us at once into the very middle of things in the lives of these characters but also illustrates from the start what I take to be a seminal contribution by Mr. Kittredge to the modern short story, a vital addition to the tradition of realism. By this I mean to point out the author's consistent, wonderful and entirely original use of the flashback, his ever-present employment of the past, personal or historical, in his stories.

The short story, because of its brevity has had great difficulties with flashbacks and writers for the most part have tended to avoid them almost entirely. No room. The plot, movement, characters proceed linearly in time, lightly, simply, toward a closeby end. One scene, two scenes three, perhaps four or five, but all in the here and now—then the closure. There are exceptions to this among writers but these haven't been consistent or ongoing for the most part and therefore have not had a decisive effect on the modern aspects of this form. The usual attempt to give the short story more weight, more intensity and extension, or even more contemporaneity, entail experiments in moving inward, into the characters themselves or into the author himself or herself, through the use of ambitious, lyrical and sometimes humorous (vid. Donald Barthelme and such) displays of flashy prose and scenes that are often discontinuous and autistic in the manner of some contemporary poetry. These experiments tend to move away from the realistic tradition itself.

Kittredge's experiments with the uses of time past, however, stay well within the traditional framework of modern realism. The name of the game in this tradition is to show all that can be seen or heard in the starkest and briefest as well as in the most natural and convincing terms. How then can Kittredge add the intensifying length of extended flashbacks without overburdening his tales, time-logging them, sinking them with the weight of action-stopping asides?

The answer is simple and far different from the complex and antirealistic solutions offered by many experimentalists. He achieves his ends by a fabulous technical mastery, pure skill, that unanalyzable quantum often called genius. His excursions into time past are always exquisitely shaped to fit into the dashing forward movement of the tale he is telling in its here and now. His retrospective glances backward are perfectly controlled and wrought. Each is a small tale (sometimes of a single line, sometimes of several paragraphs, sometimes it consists of a part of the dialogue going forward) in itself, with its own contributory plot or information, its own movement in time, setting and characters. And every single one is designed to swell, deepen and intensify the whole rushing story he is telling.

Since all of Mr. Kittredge's stories here deal with characters who live in the northwest and whose personalities and conflicts stem from earlier contexts that are always both historical and personal, this amazing ability to move backward and forward in time so effortlessly, unifies past and present in a glorious, entirely fresh and original manner.

Often in a Kittredge story one has the impression that he is seeing history itself moving, influencing the present directly. Not a mean achievement for this form.

Extreme restrictions of space prevent detailing Mr. Kittredge's work here but writing students should study him exhaustively. He points to a clear alternative to the abandonment by the modern short story writer, of realism, that tradition which has been central to the flowering of this great form from Joyce, Mansfield, Fitzgerald, Hemingway, Flannery O'Connor, and many others up to the present.

—Leonard Wallace Robinson

Max Crawford
Lords of the Plain
Atheneum
New York, New York
1985

The *llano estacado*, or staked plains of the west Texas panhandle is a high, wide escarpment, flat and unembellished, with water scarce as trees, weather the only force. Max Crawford grew up here, and the landscape he gives us, intertwined with history and myth, is locked in stone like a memory of childhood.

Men from other places cannot imagine the staked plains. . . . Here there were not bounds, no rupture, no undulation, no break or ornament or movement or change of any sort to relieve the line of the horizon. There was not a tree or bush or shrub or weed that grew above the ground. No formation of any sort, no work of man or nature. . . . There was the wind . . . But when the day was calm and the sky overcast, when one had left sight of the last lake and there were none to be seen ahead, then there was nothing.

This is the territory of war. A story of many battles, most of them fought in 1984-85 during one of the last and most senseless of the genocidal Indian wars — the Second Cavalry's pursuit and capture of the renegade Comanche band called the Wanderers, and their half-white leader, Tehana Storm.

The *llano estacao* had seen white men as early as 1541, when Coronado and his conquistadors wandered lost across it, planting stakes to prevent them from going in circles. By the mid-1800s ranchers, farmers, buffalo hunters, mule skimmers, adventuresses, and aristocrats had also claimed a stake on the plains. The stories of these indigenous characters — hidden in canyons and dug-outs and fresh-water oases — give the novel a gritty subtexture that sets it apart from the typical western romance.

The plot unfolds like an old-fashioned diary, in the mold of Kenneth Roberts' classic adventure, *Northwest Passage*. The voice belongs to Captain Philip Chapman, a sensitive, educated veteran of the Civil War with a passion for history, a horror of bloodshed, and a keen eye for detail. His meticulous notebooks coolly describe the larger-than-life landscape and the men who wander over it destroying every creature that stands in the way of profit or glory. The villain is Colonel John MacSwain, crippled in mind and body, a frustrated left-over from the Civil War, a disciple of General Sherman and his policy of "contain and punish," with 'punish' being the operative concept.

MacSwain's ultimate moment of power comes when, after a series of skirmishes and a full-blown massacre, he drives the defeated Comanche captives on a forced march to Fort Sill. In a scene that aspires to the bloody despair of Picasso's *Guernica*, MacSwain orders his reluctant troops to slaughter fifteen hundred Comanche horses. The ponies are trapped and encircled in a dry playa lakebed and methodically shot while the Indians look on, sure that they are viewing their own fate.

Although spared for the moment, this vision is true. The Comanche will be trapped on reservations, and their culture killed off until, like the buffalo whose bones are piled in shining ricks across the *llano estacado*, they will exist only as ghosts on the American landscape, unwilling participants in Tehana Storm's suicidal last stand. Later, when the Comanches are safely jailed behind the wire fence of what can only be called a concentration camp, Chapman rides out to tour one of the 'civilized' villages that serve as models for enlightened Indian policy — "a collection of neatly painted frame houses scattered over several thousand acres of tilled lands." Chapman's Indian interpreter is not sure about the moral value of this enterprise.

"I often wonder in my work, Captain, what it means to be civilized and what it means to be free. Can they mingle?"

"Neither are free, perhaps," replies Chapman, "but at least the Indians we have just seen are civilized."

After a moment, the interpreter asks, "Then civilization is what we have when freedom dies?" It is a good question, which the book wisely does not attempt to answer.

Crawford does, however, try to answer other large questions about work and power and ownership of the means of production. Marxist questions whose answers do not lie in war between whites and Indians (Texas rednecks vs. Comanches), but in the victimization of both by the rich capitalists who live in cities like New York or London and direct the conquest of land and native peoples alike. The author does not sentimentalize these 'victims'. They are given to us with all their warts. The Comanche are shown to be as cruel and violent in defense of their homeland as any Texas lynch mob.

In a long scene near the end of the novel, when Tehana Storm and his warriors are being tried for the torture and murder of a wagon-train of Texas teamsters, the white attorney for the defense attempts to convince a jury of poor farmers, ranch-hands, and small-town drifters that they are in the same boat as the 'savages' they are judging. They, too, are exiles, Scotch-Irish driven from yeoman farms in the British isles to America, where they became the frontline of American pioneers only to be disinherited again and again as wealth moved westward, until they reached the end of the trail in this barren Texas desert.

We knew nothing but the felling of trees and the planting of grain and the killing of Indians, and time and again were we felled ourselves in the dollar wars that we could understand as little as the Indian understood our loathing of trees. . . . That is why, like cornered beasts, we have lied, cheated, stolen, murdered, raped, destroyed, and driven those natives to this land from it. *We had no goddamn where else to go!*

In an appeal to "reason and mercy, of forgiveness and understanding," he asks the jury to "hand down kindness . . . to those who have wronged us and, in turn, beg such forgiveness . . . from them for our home."

After deliberating five minutes, the jury, too angry to accept either the Marxist analysis or the Christian solution, finds the Indians guilty. But the strength of *Lords of The Plain* does not lie in its politics or generalizations, which we have heard before, it lies in its particularities. Even the plot falls away in insignificance — battles and romantic encounters, forced marches and a broken marriage — against "the great wall of the *llano estacado*." Like Crawford's cavalymen, we ride into uncharted space "mesmerized by its grandeur."

Even those of us who had come upon it before gazed in wonder as this fortress loomed above us, like a bank of stone clouds. The colors were those I had never seen in nature or art: the sloping canyon walls were a fiery brick red dotted with dark green clumps of brush, the caprock escarpment mottled yellow and white, the sky behind . . . a curtain of black blue pierced by a bright solitary star mockingly luring us forward.

We come away from *Lords of The Plain* feeling as if we had been there. And that's as good as it needs to be.

—Annick Smith

William Pitt Root
Invisible Guests
Confluence Press, Inc.
Lewiston, Idaho
1984
\$5.00

In *Poetry, Language, Thought*, the philosopher Martin Heidegger wrote, "Everyday language is a forgotten and therefore used-up poem." William Pitt Root, in his most recent collection, *Invisible Guests*, recovers some of that "used-up" poetry. *Invisible Guests*

collects poems spoken in the voices of waitresses, truckers, painters, a wrestler, a weight lifter, an hermaphrodite, and a "shy phenomenologist," as well as poems dedicated to or written about a similar cast of characters.

Among these "invisible guests" is Coot, the cantankerous old prospector and homespun philosopher, certainly one of the most memorable characters ever to turn up between the covers of a book of poetry. Root devotes the first section of the book to Coot, and the old codger lays down the rules. A self-admitted "buggywhip / in a world of powerbrakes," Coot is part-mystic, part pragmatist. He values words and measures them carefully, unlike the "strangers" who are moving in on his territory: "You listen to most people talk / You try to taste their words: / Storebought." Elsewhere, he claims that the strangers speak "Book."

In Coot, Root has created a character who reminds us that speech is rooted in land and custom. He lives where language still has its feet in the dust and rip-rap, speaks "Bear" not "Book," and knows about "the kind of gold there is / still in the wilderness / that no man can haul out." When the town he lives in becomes a skiing resort, Coot laments the loss of any connection to the land for the strangers who've moved in: "Not one," he says, "knew what / the thirst is / a star quenches." Coot's confrontation with the modern world does not shake his own values; he maintains his beliefs and speaks them with a primitive, often comic, eloquence. After reading an article *Cosmopolitan* called "What To Tell You Husband If You Put On Weight—While Having An Affair," Coot responds tersely:

Whatever it is they tell her
she should say, she'd need
to learn to pronounce it in shotgun
if she was mine, cause
that's what she'd be talking
into the ears of.

Not all of Root's characters are so self-assured, so firm in their convictions. In the second section of the book, Root lets some of the homeless "strangers" speak: the inner-city black who defines himself in different terms—"I was no one / until they made me / afraid"; the "Quiet Citizen" that the government ignores, for whom language is ineffective, whose complaints are "accurately recorded"; the "Retiring Executive" who "For // profit . . . would come into his office blind"; the father who loves without "a full knowledge of love," who gives his diabetic child a sack of candy—"things / to be put in love's place." Throughout this section, Root sees how we fail to love and how, too often, we learn of our failures too late. In "Words For The Dead," the speaker addresses the deceased: "We are astounded // Now that you are dead / we cannot do enough for you."

The tone in the final section of the book is more meditative, more optimistic. Good humor and gentleness predominate; people endure, celebrate, dream. Some of the poems in this final section are more clearly "literary," and announce themselves as such. This is a bit of a let-down from the apparent—though no doubt hard-earned—artlessness of the preceding poems. Still, some wonderful poems are included here, among them are "For the World's Strongest Man," "In the North Wind of Le Pouldu," "Passing Go,"

and "A Shy Phenomenologist Breaks the Ice," This last poem is short enough to quote in full:

Where there was nothing
but your silence waiting

now there is a green skull
jeweled by green eyes

breaking the reflection
of cloud on a pond.

A fly darts down, disappears,
the face submerges.

Cloudlight heals the water
with its stillness

as our faces reappear
upon that surface, gazing

deeply into themselves
in search of the arguable frog.

And things are as they should be.
The cheek-to-cheek. The mystery.

Through *Invisible Guests*, Root and his characters speak poetry, not "Book." Yet Root and his guests also avoid the flatness we often associate with "plain speech" poetry. The characters' respect for silence and distrust of "Book" leads them to speak clear, sharp poetry. Root's poems, for example, are interruptions of speech out of and into a valued silence. Without straining after poetry, Root creates it, employing a wide range of strategies, from "found" poems to rhymed poems, from long-lined free verse to prose poems to poems that are much taller than they are wide. All of this adds up to an energetic collection of poems that are moving, thought-provoking, sometimes funny, and always pleasurable to the ear and eye.

If, as Czeslaw Milosz puts it in an epigraph to *Invisible Guests*, "the purpose of poetry is to remind us / how difficult it is to remain just one person," then these poems succeed grandly. They reveal the multiplicity of the self, a multiplicity we all share. In reaching out, in hearing well these voices or finding them within himself, Root discovers himself and, in discovering himself, discovers these others, these guests whose sufferings we suffer, whose joys we rejoice in. The poems in *Invisible Guests* awaken us to our own lives and the lives around us.

—Jon Davis

Neile Graham
Seven Robins
 Penumbra Press
 Moonbeam, Ontario
 1983
 \$6.95

Language is our sponsor and obligation. It brings us into being and requires our participation in its becoming. Ms. Graham's *Seven Robins* has as its purpose an immersion in the dual purpose of language. The danger in this project is of silence brought about by madness or retreat. What distinguishes Ms. Graham's work is a concern with silence as unarticulated fullness rather than silence as void.

The visionary Cassandra says, in the poem bearing her name:

inside the darkness the door seals
 and I am complete:
 my enclosed words
 have a heartbeat, more powerful
 that discourse, pulsing
 through my eyes.

Words are the heartbeat, yet without discourse she is sealed in the darkness of an unshared vision. In mapping the distance of language's desire to be spoken we come to the other extreme— that of retreat and despair. In "St. Maudlin (La Folle)" Ms. Graham writes:

The amazing distance:
 all the years
 she has travelled to come to this;
 'I meant to write in praise of it,
 but the distance she has come to is
 only the edge.'

Failure to praise the distance unless the territory can be fixed is its own kind of despair.

Between these two possibilities the poet wanders and waits. Words come from the fullness:

When I first arrived here I saw there were only
 two directions: up and down the river. A compass
 would point out no other course. There was nothing
 much here but the river, and the weather was always
 river. I remember when I asked the man gathering
 trout the time of day, he glanced at his watch, and
 replied, *River*.

Paradoxically, what at first appears to bear no sustenance adequate for life reveals itself to be sustenance as well as bearer.

The river runs fuller this year, and I travel in
no particular direction, up and down river. The
trout slip onto the banks and offer me words of
encouragement, saying *River, yes, always river.* ("River")

Ms. Graham's work is unusually intelligent and courageous. *Seven Robins* is a gift for which we should be grateful.

—Bette Thiebes

Paul Zarzyski
The Make-Up of Ice
University of Georgia Press
Athens, Georgia
1984
\$6.95

Paul Zarzyski once boasted of being "a lover,/ a fighter, a Polish bareback bronc rider"—all with tongue firmly in cheek, of course. Yet with the release of his first major collection, *The Make-Up of Ice*, we find that he is not only all of these things, but also one of the freshest young poets to emerge in many years, with language nimble as a spring colt, yet packing all the brute force of a Brahma bull.

When the stuffed shirts of Academe began their postulations about how poetry "enacts itself," they could hardly have imagined the wild rides they would be in for when Paul Zarzyski came along:

After the grand entry cavalcade of flags,
Star-Spangled Banner, stagecoach figure 8's
in a jangle of singletrees, after trick riders
sequined in tights, clowns in loud getups,
queens sashed pink or chartreuse
in silk— after the fanfare— the domed
rodeo arena goes lights-out
black: stark silent
prayer for a cowboy crushed by a ton
of crossbred Braham.

But this is one cowboy willing to try on a variety of hats. Zarzyski is first and foremost a lover of words, and *The Make-Up of Ice* shows just how attentively he has listened to this language of ours. Besides his ingenious use of rodeo terminology and western slang, Zarzyski has that rare talent for finding those little-used words like "snoosebox" and "skive," as well as phrases like "rowels zinging" and "the pother of trout" that really bring his poetry to life. In addition to being the devoted philologist, he is also a comedian ("Hurrah for the Stock"), an epicurean ("Escorting Grammy to the Potluck Rocky Mountain

Oyster Feed At Bowman's Corner"), an athlete ("Game," "Instant Replay"), as well as a hunter, fisherman, and Polish bareback bronc rider.

Zarzyski is a believer. When he tells us to "... pray/ for the impossible, or else/ lose all future dreams ..." he is at once admitting the inevitability of defeat while insisting we believe otherwise. Zarzyski is a great believer in luck and the power of hope (a compendium of his work would reveal just how significant these two little nouns are to him), but most of all, he places his faith in friends and family. Nearly half these poems bear dedications to friends and acquaintances, and the vast majority deal with the relationships between friends, partners, family, and lovers.

Reading *The Make-Up of Ice*, we too become believers. Poems like "Finale," "Pete Briskie's Creel," "Dekes," "Vischio," have the depth, authenticity, and raw vitality to convince anyone that Paul Zarzyski is indeed a force to be reckoned with, in poetry as well as bareback bronc riding.

—Joseph Martin

Kathleene West

Water Witching

Copper Canyon Press

Port Townsend, Washington

1984

\$7.00

In her newest collection of poems, *Water Witching*, Kathleene West divines a depth usually reserved for the lengthier craft of prose. West repeatedly proves that she is capable of taking chances and succeeding both in the lives of her poems and in her language. She allows her overriding voice to remain female rather than the generic offshoot so commonly used. Her voice is a woman who ironically, and sometimes sardonically, examines life's scars, treasures and its magic. She employs everything from mermaids, Aphrodite and Cleopatra through the recency of hardscrabble farms and natural disasters to jab us, but not jolt us, with reality. In "Celebrating Disaster," whose epigraph reads, "The Sinking of Hood Canal Bridge, February 13, 1979," she says,

No one thinks to mention fire.

Weeks later, a friend calls
to remind us.

What did you lose?

Everything.

Burnt with his cabin, books, manuscripts,
most of his past. And some of ours.

God's a harsh editor.

That's meant to be cheerful.

Nothing to give up

but delete *here*

and *here*.

What's difficult is finding what remains.
 leave on the bedside light
 and guess the dark patches—shadows
 or bruises. Someone will see
 which guess is right.

Water Witching is a quicksand of voice and rhythm. None of us can remain clean—the cadence of the memories is our own. In “Current Event,” West uses a traditional end rhyme contrasted with contemporary stress of fast-paced non-event and the stress of the words themselves. In “A New Decade: Watching the Digital Clock Advance Toward Midnight,” she juxtaposes “sing a song of love dear” (to the tune of “Sing a Song of Sixpence”) with free verse, all the while describing a regimented, near frigid couple. West’s humor is dry and scathing.

But *Water Witching* is not all nervous laughter. West can be serious, hopeful, forgiving. In “Some Thoughts on May/December Romances And Other Frustrations” she says, “The seasons are reversible.” In “For a Long Winter” she writes of canning, “Stir, turn,/ holding what we love. Now/ the compote melds its winter flavors./ Something settles on a shelf.”

West proves with *Water Witching* that she truly enjoys her work. She walks point through her jungle of scars and injustices, wallows in the irony. She builds castles with her words, divines potentialities—

She has grafted herself to this land
 where the cycle turns on harvest,
 not death.

A last look at the water lifts her spirit,
 reassures her that she shares
 the ache of return with earth and weather.
 Her breath quickens
 and she sings, her voice a counterpoint
 to the regularity of rise and fall,
 the lone melodic line of plainsong,
 a chant to celebrate the continuous ritual
 that enters her words
 that survives without her
 that she sings.

(from “By Water Divined”)
 —Bronwyn G. Pughe

CutBank 24 was printed at the University of Montana Print Shop. The editors wish to thank the print shop for its patience and generous assistance.

The editors also extend a special thank you to Sandra Alcosser for serving as judge for the Richard Hugo Memorial Award and to Rick DeMarinis for serving as judge for the A. B. Guthrie, Jr. Short Fiction Award.

Thanks also to Patty Rexston of the Missoulian and Don Kludt of the print shop who helped advise us with the cover design.

DANIEL BOURNE has poems forthcoming in *Poetry Northwest* and *minnesota review*. He's applied for a Fulbright Grant to Poland to continue his translation work.

CHRISTINE BRISTOW lives and does not work in Chico, California. Her work has appeared in *Watershed*.

CHARLES COCKELREAS is a 1961 graduate of the Writer's Workshop in Iowa. He is a film maker who has won several national awards. He has poems forthcoming in the *Rio Grande Riview* and makes his home in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

DAVID W. DALE received his M.A. from the University of Montana and has taught high school for several years in Ronan, Montana. His poems have appeared in *Jeopardy* and *The Slackwater Review* and others.

RICHARD DANIELS teaches writing and literature at Oregon State University in Corvallis, he is a poetry editor at the *minnesota review*.

JON DAVIS, former co-editor of *CutBank*, won this year's Academy of American Poets Prize at the University of Montana where he has just completed his M.F.A. in Poetry. His reviews have appeared in *The Hollins Critic*, *The Literary Magazine Review* and others.

CHARD DeNIORD is finishing his M.F.A at the Iowa Writers' Workshop. He once worked as a psychiatric aide and out-patient psychotherapist in New Haven, Connecticut. This is his second appearance in *CutBank*.

JIM DORAN is an M.F.A. student at the University of Montana. He writes both fiction and poetry and has one chapbook of poems, *Otto*, out.

NANCY EIMERS' poems have appeared in *Tendril*, *Crazy Horse*, *North American Review* and other magazines. Currently, she is working on a Ph.D. in English at the University of Houston.

ELAINE EPSTEIN lives and writes in New York City. Her work has appeared in numerous magazines, including *The Antioch Riview*, *Pequod*, and *The Georgia Riview*.

KEN GERNER was raised in the Bitterroot Valley of Western Montana and graduated from the University of Montana with an honors degree in Philosophy. He's taught as a Poet-In-Schools in Oregon, Washington and Alaska. His second book, *Throwing Shadows* is due out from Copper Canyon Press this summer.

JIM HALL lives in Key Largo and directs the writing program at Florida International University. His third book, *False Statements*, will be released by Carnegie-Mellon University Press in late 1985.

R.L. HORTON lives in Little River, California. He has published stories in *Spectrum*, *Mendocino Review*, and *Big River News*, as well as other newspapers and magazines.

HARRY HUMES edits *Yarrow*. His first book, *Winter Weeds*, won the Devins Prize and was published by University of Missouri Press. Besides loving to flyfish for trout, Mr. Humes lives in the Hex Country of Pennsylvania.

DONNELL HUNTER'S poems have appeared in *Poetry Now*, *Bellingham Review* and *Cut Bank*. His chapbook, *The Frog in Our Basement*, was published in 1984. He teaches at Ricks College in Rexburg, Idaho.

B.S. JONES lives in St. Louis, Missouri and has published fiction in *Bottomfish*, *Sun Dog*, *Colorado-North Riview* and *Midwest Arts and Literature*.

BARRY KITTERMAN has had stories in *California Quarterly* and *Carolina Quarterly*. He is also a very nice guy.

CHRISTIAN KNOELLER'S most recent publications include *The Greenfield Review*, *Orca Anthology* and *Willow Springs*. He lives in Juneau, Alaska where he is researching a book on brown bears.

LISA LEWIS received her M.F.A. from the University of Iowa. Her poems have appeared in *Tar River Poetry* and *Black Warrior Review* as well as work forthcoming in *Tendril*, *Iowa Review* and others. Currently, she's working on a Ph.D. at the University of Houston.

NEIL McMAHON'S fiction has appeared in *The Atlantic*, *Epoch* and other magazines. He works as a carpenter in Missoula, Montana.

ELAINE MOTT lives in Bayside, New York where she writes both poetry and fiction. Her work has recently appeared in *Cincinnati Poetry Review*, *Black Ice* and *Fiction 84*. In 1984, she was awarded an Honorable Mention in the Chester H. Jones Poetry Competition.

TIMOTHY MUSKAT describes himself as a wayfarer, dog owner, misanthrop and inhabitant of corners and a cabin in Clinton, Montana. He received his M.F.A. from the University of Montana in 1985.

BRENDA NASIO was an assistant poetry and fiction editor for *Mademoiselle Magazine* as well as being an editorial assistant at the *Paris Review*. Her work has appeared in numerous publications, including *Crab Creek Review*, *Laurel Review*, *Mississippi Mud* and *Negative Capability*.

BILL O'CONNELL recently turned thirty and completed an M.A. in Creative Writing at Colorado State University in Fort Collins. He now resides in Belchertown, Massachusetts.

VERLENA ORR is a graduate of the University of Montana with an M.F.A. in poetry. A native of Kamiah, Idaho, she now lives in Portland, Oregon.

WALTER PAVLICH'S first book is due out from Barnwood Press in 1985. His recent work has appeared in *Oxford Magazine*, *Cincinnati Poetry Review* and *Swallow's Tale*. He is a recipient of a fellowship for 1984-85 from the Oregon Arts Commission.

JOHN QUINN'S poems appear in numerous publications, including *Seattle Review* and *Yarrow*. His first book, *The Wolf Last Seen*, is being reissued by Pacific House in Eugene, Oregon. Besides wanting to ride a Harley Davidson to work, Mr. Quinn lives and teaches in Nagoya, Japan.

KAREN RASCO has had collages, prints and drawings in over 60 little magazines, including *Kayak*, *Michigan Quarterly Review* and *Wisconsin Review*. She is currently studying printmaking at the Art Institute of Chicago.

ERIC RAWSON is a Teaching-Writing Fellow at the Iowa Writers' Workshop. His work is forthcoming in several periodicals, including the *APR*, *Mid-American Review*, and *Tar River Poetry*.

LEONARD WALLACE ROBINSON was an editor at *The New Yorker* and at *Esquire*. His stories have appeared in numerous magazines and he has been awarded the O'Henry Prize. The author of two novels, Robinson's first book of poetry, *In The Whale*, was released last year by Barnwood Press.

SHELLEY SANDERS grew up on a farm-ranch outside of Conrad, Montana. Currently, she is a sophomore in Creative Writing and Latin at the University of Montana. This is her first publication.

REG SANER'S recent book of poems, *Essay on Air*, is available from Ohio Review Books. It alternates scenes between the American West and Italy, says Mr. Saner, "where time is especially legible." Mr. Saner teaches at the University of Colorado at Boulder.

NANCY SCHOENBERGER'S chapbook, *The Taxidermist's Daughter* (Calliopea Press, 1979), won the first Montana First Book Award. She lives in New York City and teaches a poetry workshop at the Academy of American Poets. She is also the recipient of the Richard Hugo Memorial Prize for 1985.

REBECCA SEIFERLE'S poems have appeared in *Carolina Quarterly*, *Northwest Review*, *Indiana Review* and other magazines. A resident of New Mexico, Rebecca was the recipient of the Babcock Award.

TOM SEXTON is co-director of the Writing Program at the University of Alaska, Anchorage. His most recent work has appeared in *The Chariton Review*, *The Texas Review* and *Anthology of Magazine Verse and Yearbook of American Poetry*.

LORETTA SHARP established the writing program at the Interlochen Arts Academy. She received a Michigan Council for the Arts Artist Award for 1984-85 and a Fulbright for summer study in India during 1984.

MAURYA SIMON is currently Visiting Lecturer in Creative Writing at the University of California at Riverside. She spent a year living in Madras, South India, and is working on a poem about the disaster in Bhopal. Her poems are forthcoming in *Poetry*, *Field*, and *The Little Magazine*.

ANNICK SMITH is a film maker, writer and occasional reviewer from the Blackfoot Valley.

DAVID SWICKARD lives in East Hampton, New York, where he is executive director of a local history museum complex and music critic for *The East Hampton Star*. His poems are forthcoming in *Confrontations*, *The Smith* and *Barnwood*.

BETTE THIEBES is working on her M.A. in English at the University of Montana.

DON WELCH is published in numerous magazines, has three books of poetry out and was the winner of the 1980 Pablo Neruda Award for Poetry. He lives in Kearney, Nebraska.

LIZA WIELAND teaches composition and literature at Columbia University in New York.

WILLIAM YELLOW ROBE is an Assinoboine Indian from Wolf Point on the Fort Peck Reservation in Montana. He is an actor and playwright whose plays "Sneaky" and "Grandma Why?" will be produced at the KYL-YO conference in Missoula in May. "The Burning of Uncle" is his first fiction publication.

PAUL ZARZYSKI has published two volumes of poetry, *Call Me Lucky* (a chapbook from Confluence Press), and *The Make-Up of Ice* (University of Georgia Press). His work appears in numerous periodicals, and he has taught Creative Writing at the University of Montana.

Books Received

- A LIFE LIKE MINE, William Kloefkorn, poems, Platte Valley Press, \$4.00.
A VACATION FROM WORRY, Larry Stenzel, fiction (chapbook), Samuel Powell Publishing Co., \$3.00.
FIDDLE WRAPPED IN A GUNNY SACK, Edward Harkness, poems, Dooryard Press, \$6.50.
FUGITIVE ANGELS, Jeanne Murray Walker, poems, Dragon Gate, Inc., \$14.00 cloth, \$7.00 paper.
JOURNEY, Suzanne Overall, poems (no further information available).
ONE WORLD AT A TIME, Ted Kooser, poems, University of Pittsburgh Press, \$12.95 cloth, \$6.95 paper.
TAZ ALAGO: PURSUING THE FIVE TRIBES OF THE NEZ PERCE, 1877/1983, Richard Blevins, poems, Zelot-Taney Press, \$3.50.
THE MAP OF LEAVING, Jack Heflin, poems (Montana First Book Award), Arrow Graphics & Typography, \$5.00.
THE MAZE, Mick Fedullo, poems, The Galileo Press, \$6.50 cloth, \$4.50 paper.

Magazines Received

- ABRAXAS, (31/32) Ingrid Swanberg, ed., 2518 Gregory Street, Madison, Wisconsin 53711. \$4.00.
AGNI REVIEW, (Issue 21) Sharon Dunn, ed., P.O. Box 660, Amherst, Massachusetts 01004. \$4.00.
BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL, (Winter 1984-1985) Marion K. Stocking, ed., RFD 2, Box 154, Ellsworth, Maine 04605. \$1.50.
BLACK ICE, (Number One) Dale Shank, ed., 571 Howell Avenue, Cincinnati, Ohio 45221. \$4.00.
CAROLINA QUARTERLY, (Winter 1985 Vol. 37 No. 2) Mary Titus, ed., Greenlaw Hall 066A, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina 27514. \$4.00.
CINCINNATI POETRY REVIEW, (No. 12) Dallas Wiebe, ed., Department of English 069, University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, Ohio 4522. \$3.00.
CLAY & PINE, (Number One, Spring 1984) Jill E. King and Camille Bielby, eds., English & Foreign Languages, Georgia Southwestern College, Americus, Georgia 31709. No price listed.
COLORADO-NORTH REVIEW, (Winter 1985) L.A. Fleming, ed., University Center, University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, Colorado 80639. \$2.50.
COLUMBUS NAMES THE FLOWERS, (Mr. Cogito's 12 year anthology) Robert A. Davies and John M. Gogol, eds., UC Box 627, Pacific University, Forest Grove, Oregon 97116. \$6.50 plus postage.

- INDIANA REVIEW, (Vol. 8/No. 1) Erin McGraw, ed., 316 N. Jordan Avenue, Bloomington, Indiana 47405. \$4.00.
- IOWA REVIEW, (Vol. 4/No. 2 1984) David Hamilton, ed., 308 EPB, The University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa 52242.
- KANSAS QUARTERLY, (Vol. 16, Numbers 1-2, 1984) Harold Schneider, Ben Nyberg, W.R. Moses, John Rees, eds., Department of English, Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas 66506. \$6.00.
- MANHATTAN REVIEW, (Winter 1984/85) Philip Fried, ed., 304 Third Avenue, Apt. 4A, New York, New York 10010. \$4.00.
- NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW, (March 1985) Robley Wilson, ed., University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, Iowa 50614. \$2.50.
- PAINTBRUSH, (Vol. X, Nos. 19 & 20) Ben Bennani, ed., English & Foreign Languages, Georgia Southwestern College, Americus, Georgia 31709. \$8.00.
- PASSAGES NORTH, (Fall/Winter 1984-85) Elinor Benedict, ed., William Bonifas Fine Arts Center, Escanaba, Michigan 49829. \$1.00.
- PENNSYLVANIA REVIEW, (Spring 1985) Lee Gutkind, ed., The Writing Program, Department of English, 526 Cathedral of Learning, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA 15260. \$5.00.
- POET LORE, (Volume 79 Number 4) Kevin Madden, ed., Heldref Publications, 4000 Albemarle Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20016. \$4.50.
- POETS ON: NOURISHMENT, (Winter 1985) Ruth Daigon, ed., Box 255, Chaplin, CT 06235. \$3.50.
- PUERTO DEL SOL, (Volume 20, No. 2) Kevin McIlvoy, ed., Creative Writing Center, College of Arts and Sciences, Box 3E, New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, New Mexico 88003. \$3.00.
- QUARTERLY WEST, (Fall/Winter 1984-85) Wyn Cooper, ed., 317 Olpin Union, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah 84112. \$3.50.
- SMALL PRESS REVIEW, (January 1985) Len Fulton, ed., Dustbooks, P.O. Box 100, Paradise, California 95969. \$16/yr.
- STAND MAGAZINE, (Winter 1984-85) Jon Silkin, Lorna Tracy and Michael Blackburn, eds., P.O. Box 648, Concord, Mass. 01742. \$3.00.
- STORY QUARTERLY, (18/1984) Pamela Painter and Thalia Ceronis-Selz, eds., P.O. Box 1416, Northbrook, Illinois 60062. \$4.00.
- THE POET, (Winter 1984-85) Peggy Cooper, ed., Cooper Publishing House, P.O. Box 44021, Shreveport, Louisiana 71134-4021. \$4.00.
- WESTERN HUMANITIES REVIEW, (Spring 1985) Jack Garlington, ed., University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah 84112. \$4.00.
- XANADU, (Tenth Issue/1984) Lois V. Walker, et. al., eds., Long Island Poetry Collective, Inc., Box 773, Huntington, New York 11743. \$5.00.

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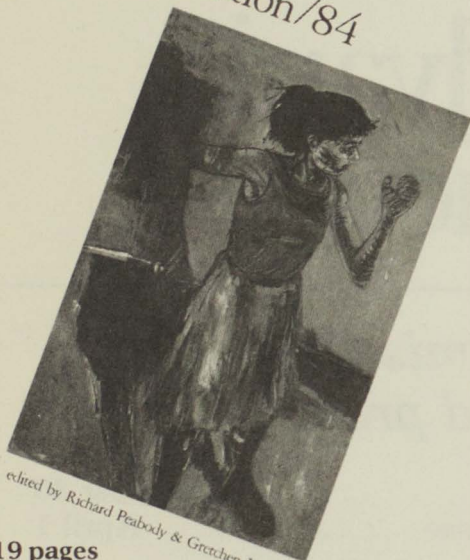
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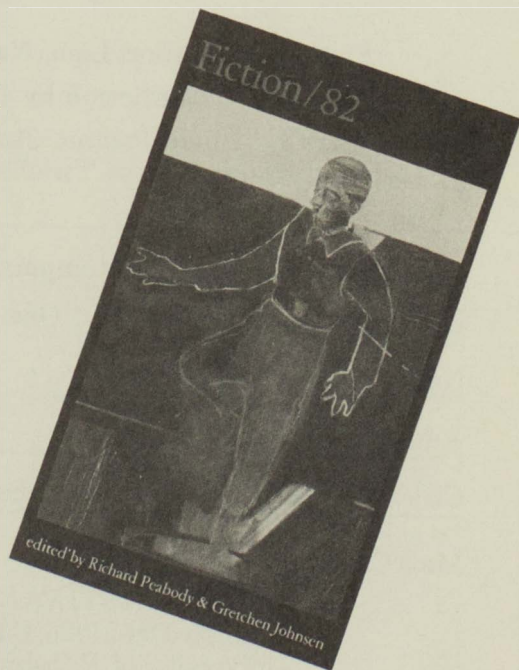
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The Purpose of Hair

On the scalp there is none.
But around the lips and other lips
and in the delicate darkness
hair is the fern that tells us
there is the lightest breeze.

On the arms it gives each goose
chill an aerial to broadcast
the blood's music across the room.
And knuckle hair is edible
and soothing, something to chew
when kissing is no longer enough.

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it is the first mild unloveliness
that love must overcome.

Jim Hall



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